

THE IVORY FAN

BY

ADRIAN HEARD



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THE IVORY FAN

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BY

ADRIAN HEARD

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CONTENTS

BOOK I

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. ROBERT ARLSEA	13
II. JIM	30
III. LILY	37
IV. BLUFF	45
V. NORMAN SWAINE	53
VI. MRS. CONWAY GIVES ADVICE	61
VII. KENSINGTON GARDENS	70
VIII. THE SONG	82
IX. A CHINA ASH-TRAY	92
X. THE BROKEN TEA-SET	101
XI. CATHERINE LOCKS THE DOOR	110
XII. "THE IVORY FAN"	119
XIII. THE WRITING ON THE FAN	130
XIV. MARTIN "STANDS BY"	136
XV. LILY SEES BEHIND THE FAN	144

BOOK II

I. "LE JEU EST FAIT"	155
II. ROULETTE	169

CHAPTER	PAGE
III. CHARTREUSE	179
IV. EDNA CARLTON	187
V. A LANDED FISH	193
VI. THE SILVER BAG	201
VII. ABSINTHE	211
VIII. THE ORANGE JEWEL	222

BOOK III

I. MARTIN KEEPS A PROMISE	231
II. SWAINE MAKES A STATEMENT	239
III. THE DEAD BLACKBIRD	248
IV. LILY SPEAKS HER MIND	256
V. "CHINOIS"	263
VI. THE ROSE-COLOURED MASK	272
VII. THE END OF CARNIVAL	284
VIII. A PROPOSAL	292
IX. MARTIN OPENS A DRAWER	299
X. CLARE TAKES HER STAND	307
XI. THE BROKEN FAN	314

9
7
3
I
I
2

31
39
48
56
63
72
84
92
99
07
14

BOOK I

"O weep for Adonais—he is dead!"

Adonais: SHELLEY.

CHAPTER I

ROBERT ARLSEA

ROBERT ARLSEA had married when he was twenty-one; he had married a woman who was a year older than himself, with whom he had fallen in love because of a pretty figure and a handsome face, which, however, bore the marks of an ignorant mind and an uncertain temper: marks which would hardly tend to diminish as time laid a blurring finger on its youthful freshness.

When the first contentment of his marriage was over, it began to become apparent to Robert that his own buoyancy of temperament and generosity of disposition would find little or no response in Susan Arlsea's carping nature and narrow understanding. He quickly realized that there was much he must simply learn to do without, and he set himself to master this lesson with the same patience and good-humour with which he faced all the lessons life held for him. Only a certain frankness died within him: he no longer spoke freely to his wife of his business worries or his personal hopes, and she, finding him becoming, as she believed, more docile, tightened her grasp upon the reins of her dominance.

Nor was the state of affairs between the young

couple improved by the arrival, a year or so after their marriage, of an infant daughter. Susan Arlsea had no vocation for motherhood. To the mind that found the size of the grocer's bill, the delinquencies of servants and the imagined slights of her neighbours troubles of immensity, the inconvenience and suffering consequent upon the birth of a child was not less than a tragedy.

When, too, the baby turned out to be a girl, Mrs. Arlsea's grievance against the fates for having added such an insult to their injury of her was complete. The principal sufferer from all these woes was of course Robert Arlsea, her husband.

Robert had married his wife for love: and he continued to love her with a faithfulness and patient loyalty which she was quite incapable of appreciating. Rather, she found in his affectionate nature and yielding temper ever fresh food for her voracious egotism and vanity and her peevish fretfulness against a world which she could not induce to take her at her own valuation.

In these surroundings the little Catherine overcame the trials and troubles of infancy and began, at about the age of four, her conscious effort to settle accounts with the world.

In her father's garden she learned with the seasons' succession to watch for the coming of the first primrose, to love the scent of flowering currant and syringa, to chase thistledown over the lawn and to crack and taste the ice on standing pools. Later she learned which flowers her father loved:

to look forward to Saturday afternoons and Sundays because he was at home from his office, and to dread the tap of fingers on a window-pane.

When she grew older she discovered that there were certain corners in the garden which no windows in the house overlooked, and these became her favourite haunts. In these corners she played little lonely games with flower-pots and leaves and pebbles. For Mrs. Arlsea did not consider human society to be good for her daughter. Other children taught Catherine bad habits—to romp and shout and to spoil her clothes; besides this, they were a nuisance in the house and necessitated her remaining at home of an afternoon to superintend their behaviour and preside at the nursery tea. So the child played alone, and wove endless phantasies in which the princess Catherine lived in a wonderful land where none of the houses had windows and every day was a Saturday. For on Saturdays Robert Arlsea returned from business at mid-day, and often he would spend the whole afternoon and evening at play with Catherine, who, as she grew older, became more and more his friend and companion.

And side by side with this devotion to her father grew a great fear of and antipathy to her mother. Precocious as she was from associating only with grown-up people, she soon learnt to observe facts and deduce inferences. Mrs. Arlsea's general irritability and sudden fits of temper were at first dreaded by the child on her own account, and then, as she grew older, she began to resent

them for the sake of her father. It was a cause of passionate revolt to her that he should be arraigned for faults that, it was plainly apparent even to the child's comprehension, had no existence outside her mother's carping demands upon him. Robert Arlsea, who so well understood his daughter's impulsive nature, was too just towards the wife he had chosen to allow any display of preference in her child. He never attempted to reason with Mrs. Arlsea nor to explain away her faults to Catherine, but maintained an equal silence towards one as to the other. Only as Catherine became older he spent more and more of his time with her in the evenings when he was at home, and as the years passed and her education was commenced, it was he who helped the girl with her school tasks and patiently explained to her all that he himself knew. For Mrs. Arlsea decreed that Catherine should not go to school, but should be taught at home by a governess, preferring not to part with any atom of the power that was hers to dominate her daughter's life. In so ordaining, however, she defeated her own end, for Catherine in her newly discovered world of the intelligence found afresh a companion in her father, behind whose practical mind lay a poetic streak which, as soon as she learned of its existence, made a powerful appeal to his daughter, who inherited his temperament.

These matters, lying as they did outside Mrs. Arlsea's conception of the universe, were for a time disregarded by her, but when at length they

penetrated to her understanding, she became acutely jealous of her daughter.

Catherine, who was now entering on her fourteenth year and whose naturally sensitive disposition had been fostered by the lack of child companions, very quickly apprehended the situation. Its effect on her receptive temperament was powerful. In the first place, her love for her father underwent a subtle change, and into the intercourse which had hitherto been entirely frank and happy crept a certain reserve.

"The buds are out on the new pansy, Father." she had exclaimed one day as he entered the gate, and taking his arm, she had led him to the spot where the plant grew. Together they were stooping over the large brown and purple blossoms when suddenly there came a sharp tapping on a window, and Catherine started violently, while Robert drew himself up and silently went away into the house.

Catherine remained standing by the plant where he had left her, but her eyes, still fixed on the soft brown flowers, saw nothing, for her spirit had flamed into sudden revolt. She felt spring up in her, side by side with her deep devotion for her father, a leaping flame of anger and resentment for her mother, the fierce heat of which seemed to scorch her very soul.

She turned about with a sudden physical desire for escape.

She was never allowed to go out on the roads alone, such being Mrs. Arlsea's conception of

propriety ; but there was at the bottom of the garden a large field whose hedges afforded many nooks from which the house was invisible. Through a gap leading into this field Catherine now went, and seeking the shelter of a bank, she seated herself there to try to resolve the problem presented to her girlish mind by the tempest seething within it.

She was conscious that her affection for her father was just and reasonable as well as natural, but of late this affection that had always seemed so reasonably contenting had been repressed, and being made to appear as a guilty thing, had sunk the more deeply into the girl's soul, and, lying hidden there, had gradually begun to permeate her whole life, where, shut away and covered from the light as it now was, it took in the confinement and darkness strange and bewildering shapes.

Now, as she sat alone in the harvest field in failing light, she wondered with a vague apprehension what the future held that would solve these problems, and she rejected a plan to "run away" as soon as she grew up because she knew that she could never willingly leave Robert Arlsea. She fell into a daydream in which she and her father lived and played in a sunlit garden where it was always summer and where there were no sounds but those made by their laughter and the song of the birds. Then a vividly coloured leaf on a bramble, high in the hedge, attracted her attention, and she forgot her fancies in trying to reach it.

The future held a different solution of her difficulties from any that Catherine had pictured.

One evening, about the time when she was approaching her fifteenth birthday, Robert Arlsea came home from his business looking more than usually fatigued.

For some days he seemed ill and miserable, and once he even stayed at home from the office, although he rose as usual and tried to get about the house. He developed an odd-sounding cough, which kept Mrs. Arlsea awake at night, and several times Catherine caught him furtively regarding her with anxious eyes.

Some three weeks passed in this way before he returned home one evening and went straight to bed.

The next morning a doctor was called in and pronounced Robert Arlsea to be dangerously ill.

He earned Mrs. Arlsea's everlasting dislike by insisting upon sending a trained nurse to take charge of the case, and Catherine was sent away to the house of some relatives.

Before she left, she crept to her father's door and peeped round it at the flushed face on the pillow. Robert's eyes were open, and he raised his head a little and replied to her question that he was better. He did not seem to realize to whom he spoke, and Catherine left the room, a nameless terror at her heart.

It was then towards the end of November, and there was snow on the ground when, three days later, they came to tell her that her father was dead.

In after-life Catherine never ~~was~~ clearly

the events of the days that followed. Only two or three incidents stood out clearly. A horrible picture in the room at her relative's where she slept, depicting a girl's head with wide strained eyes and a vista of a Roman arena as a background, called "Faith": the snow on the roofs in the mornings: a pot of Roman hyacinths in the hall when she entered it on her return to what had hitherto been her home: the scraping of men's feet on the tiled floor as her father's coffin was carried along it, and, strangely clear, the recollection that as she stood waiting to put a little wreath at his head someone, a woman, came and spoke softly to her, saying that her dress had become unfastened at the shoulder and that her mother wished it to be put right.

Nearly everyone in the town turned out to accompany Robert Arlsea's body to its last resting-place: for everyone loved him, and there were few in the long procession that had not at some time felt the benefit of his friendship.

In after-years Catherine's dazed mind retained only the recollection of a succession of vehicles and the picture of a man of the working class to whom Robert Arlsea had been a lifelong friend, who wept audibly, his red handkerchief making a splash of colour against the black coats of the mourners.

Within two years of Robert Arlsea's death, Mrs. Arlsea determined to give up her house at Mortham and go to live in London. She had been

left well off, but not really rich, a state of affairs which caused her great chagrin, as she was consequently unable to afford to keep two establishments. She rented a small house in Gloucester Road, and here, at the age of sixteen, Catherine began life anew, or rather strove to piece together from her own inner consciousness a world in which to live and breathe.

For a time after her father's death Catherine hoped that a change had taken place in her mother's attitude to life and towards herself; but it soon became apparent that, although in some ways Susan Arlsea had changed, it could hardly be said to be a change for the better. Less captious and irritable she certainly was. But the sudden turn of fortune that had bereft her of the love and companionship of a good man had given her what her vain and shallow mind was well able to appreciate—absolute freedom and a sound income on which to live in what manner it pleased her. She was now about forty years old, young-looking for her age and still a very pretty woman. She was not long in discovering that her position as a widow of means endowed her with fresh attractions and reopened for her certain possibilities. In her husband's lifetime she had been careless of her appearance, but her interest in dress now began to revive, and as she had excellent taste she was able on the income assured her to present a very up-to-date and attractive appearance.

She still continued to exercise strict authority over her daughter's outward movements. Catherine

ine was given little or no personal freedom, her actions were enquired into and curbed, her frocks chosen for her and her amusements planned.

In spite of all this, however, it soon became apparent that in some subtle way her authority over her daughter was diminished. She could and did control Catherine's movements and regulate her doings; but it was obvious even to Mrs. Arlsea's intelligence that her dominion over the girl's mind was at an end.

The hidden cause of this was revealed to her one day by the remark of the friend at whose instigation she had come to live in London, one Mrs. Conway, a woman of her own stamp, but of superior intelligence and less affluent means, which latter fact made them agreeable to one another as companions. Mrs. Conway one day remarked to her friend that Catherine read too much.

"I never allowed my daughters to read a great deal," she said, speaking of her two eldest children, now, happily for themselves, married and living away from London. "It is not at all good for girls; it fills their heads with all sorts of notions, and one never knows what may be going on in their minds when they get a fondness for novels."

"I know all that goes on in Catherine's mind, I assure you," replied Mrs. Arlsea tartly; "I take very good care to do so. She has no ideas that are hidden from me."

Mrs. Conway gave her a penetrating glance,

and with a lift of her shoulders changed the subject.

The idea, however, rankled in Mrs. Arlsea's mind, and she sought an early opportunity of broaching the matter to Catherine. This she found with the approaching termination of their quarterly subscription to Mudies'.

"I shall not rejoin the library for the summer quarter," she observed to Catherine one evening. "You have been reading a great deal too much lately, and now that the weather is becoming warmer you had better be more out of doors."

Catherine, who was absorbed in a second reading of *Pride and Prejudice*, looked up.

"What did you say about Mudies', Mother? I'm sorry I didn't catch it."

Mrs. Arlsea repeated the remark with greater emphasis.

Catherine did not immediately reply. She closed the book and walked to the window, where she stood for some moments looking out. Then she came across to where her mother sat turning over the leaves of a fashion journal.

"I intend to go on with my reading, Mother," she said quietly.

Mrs. Arlsea's face expressed surprise, followed by anger. This was the first time Catherine had ever asserted her will, and Mrs. Arlsea found the experience very irritating.

"What you intend does not concern me," she replied with emphasis; "it is what I intend that counts."

Catherine drew a long breath. "It does, however, concern me, Mother," she said. "I happen to be rather fond of reading and I do not mean to give it up."

Mrs. Arlsea coloured angrily.

"You will find yourself obliged to do so," she retorted. "As I told you, I do not mean to renew my subscription to the library at present, and as you have no money, they will hardly lend you books for nothing."

Catherine hesitated. She knew it was useless to appeal to her mother's sense of justice. Susan Arlsea could be generous enough with money, but very little understood generosity of mind.

"If you feel you cannot afford it," she said, "I could surely be allowed to do without something else."

"Please do not argue, Catherine. It is not a question of money, it is a question of what I wish. You are reading too much and I consider it bad for your eyes. There is no more to be said."

The girl turned away, and taking up the book again, reseated herself.

Mrs. Arlsea continued: "I don't think it is at all necessary for girls to acquire a great deal of knowledge, and novel-reading fills their heads with all sorts of silly ideas. My father never allowed us to read much."

"What would you wish me to do instead of reading?" asked Catherine. "I want to learn some profession, but you will not let me. I must be employed somehow, I suppose."

"We need not discuss the question. You don't require to work for your living."

"I do require something to live upon," Catherine said. "Since—since we left Mortham I have wished to take up some definite work and you will not have it so. It seems I must be idle. Very well, then, if I am to lead a stupid, idle life I must. But at any rate I shall try to teach myself all I can while I am able to."

"Catherine," exclaimed Mrs. Arlsea angrily, "that is quite enough. I have told you the library subscription will not be renewed at present. Really, I don't know what the girls of the present day are coming to. When I was young, girls were not taught any of these subjects and they were much better off. I never learnt French or German, and I did very well for myself when I married your father; though of course I am not left so well off as I ought to have been. Now, will you please go to bed? The Conways are coming to-morrow, and that will mean a late night for you."

At the mention of her father's name Catherine had flushed crimson, and she now rose from her chair and, laying aside her book, left the room without a word.

Mrs. Arlsea tapped the paper she held with the handle of her lorgnettes impatiently. Her daughter was a very peculiar girl, she thought. She was certainly handsome and would probably develop into rather a fine-looking woman, but she was spoilt by her seriousness.

Mrs. Arlsea decided that she would be very difficult to marry well. Men did not like that kind of woman: they preferred prettiness as a rule and a chatty manner. She patted her hair complacently and turned the rings about on her slim white hands before returning to the contemplation of the gowns depicted in the magazine she held.

Upstairs, Catherine had drawn a chair to the window of her bedroom and sat gazing out on the lamp-lit street.

Curiously enough, her thoughts ran in much the same groove as those of her mother. She wondered whom she should marry.

For some time past she had made up her mind that she would marry as soon as possible. After her father's death she had tried to persuade her mother to let her go to college. But Mrs. Arlsea had refused the request. Catherine should not leave home, she had said, and had expressed a feeling of ill-usage that her daughter should even think of such a thing. Catherine had made a second attempt some months later to persuade her mother that it would be best for them both that she should leave home, and on this occasion Mrs. Arlsea had produced a black-bordered pocket-handkerchief and enquired tearfully what Catherine thought her father would have said had he known that she would ever think of leaving her mother alone.

Catherine had dropped the subject at once

and had never again referred to it until that evening.

Since, then, it was decided that she was to remain at home until she should marry, the remedy was obvious. She must marry, and as soon as possible. Matrimony, to be sure, made no great appeal to her. She had, of course, been carefully educated in complete ignorance of the real meaning or obligations of the contract, and what she had managed to glean from the books she read, being imperfectly apprehended, had offended her girlish fastidiousness: neither did the examples she found in life make any very cheerful impression. The two Conway girls had been married before Catherine knew them, one to a Mr. Salford, a wealthy merchant some fifteen years older than herself, the other to a young curate whom Catherine mentally characterized as "a brainless ass." Her one girl friend, Lily Kellaway, never hesitated to admit that she herself meant to marry for position.

"Had such a devil of a time at home, old girl," she would say between puffs of a cigarette; "never remember when there was enough money to go round. It's to be De Reszkes or Abdullas when I light the matrimonial fag. No more gaspers for me!"

Catherine, sitting alone in the dark, checked a curl of her lip at the recollection and asked herself how what right she sneered, since she herself meant to accept the first reasonably good offer she received in order to get away from home—

no, she corrected herself, in order to acquire a home; in order to have something in life which she could call her own. After all, she thought, the majority of husbands were out all day. The wife must have many hours of complete freedom. The immediate drawback to her plan, she reflected cynically, appeared to be lack of suitors. It was true she met quite a few men at the Kellaways' and on the occasions when she spent a week end with the Salfords at their house on the river; but she knew no one really well except Jim Conway. Jim was rather old, she thought; he must be quite thirty, and he was turning grey. But he was very handsome, and even Lily Kellaway admitted that he was a gentleman. Catherine liked and trusted him; she knew that he was just and honourable and that his teasing manner covered a real affection for herself. She now resolved to tell him about the affair of the library subscription when he came with his people on the following evening.

She rose and went to the glass to begin brushing her hair. She had only put it up a month or so ago, and as she drew out the pins the heavy mass fell easily from its unaccustomed confinement.

She paused, brush in hand, to regard the image presented by the mirror. Her father's clear-cut features were reflected there and Robert Arlsea's dark grey eyes looked sadly out at her.

There was nothing here that was not his, she

thought thankfully ; nothing of her mother's fair prettiness.

" You did well for yourself, Mother," she murmured, " as you say. But what did you do for him—and for me ? "

CHAPTER II

JIM

"JIM," said Catherine softly, "I want to speak to you."

They were standing together by a small table in the Arlsea's drawing-room, and Jim, who was turning over the pages of a book, raised his eyes and regarded her over the top of it with an enquiring smile. His smile was very attractive; it lighted up his dark eyes and gave a softer expression to the clear-cut features and firmly set mouth that in repose was apt to relapse into melancholy.

He threw an expressive glance in the direction of his mother and Mrs. Arlsea, seated on the sofa and deep in a discussion of summer hats, and then looked across to where his father was showing Lily Kellaway a new kind of patience, to that young lady's very evident boredom.

"Got any new music?" he enquired casually, moving towards the piano as he spoke.

"A piece of Grieg's," answered Catherine. She pulled it out from under a pile of music and placed it on the rack. "It's about mother," she added, dropping her voice.

Jim seated himself at the piano and began to

try over the music. "I didn't know Grieg wrote anything about mother!" he said.

"Nonsense, Jim, and don't chaff. It's serious."

Jim jerked his head towards a chair beside him and Catherine seated herself. "You turn over. I believe I can play this at sight," he said aloud, adding softly: "What is it, Catherine? Tell away and I'll keep up a row."

In a few low sentences and with artistic pauses and an occasional interjection aloud on the subject of the piece, Catherine related the conversation that had taken place between her mother and herself on the previous evening.

"Nothing will induce me to give up my books," she finished. "Wow! That's a wrong note, Jim."

Jim put down the loud pedal. "I mistook it for a sharp," he said. "What are you going to do about it?"

"That's what I want you to tell me. You know what my life is like. If it were not for my books, I might as well be dead."

"I think you've a reasonable case, certainly. Have you put your point of view? I don't think I got that run quite smoothly!"

"You certainly didn't! My point of view goes for nothing, as you very well know."

He repeated the run several times. "I hope you don't mind this horrid noise, Mrs. Arlsea!" he called across the room.

Mrs. Arlsea said that she was used to Catherine's practising and returned to the subject of Leghorns.

"It resolves itself into a question of funds," Catherine continued after a pause, "for if mother won't pay the subscription I must."

Jim nodded and bent forward to read the music. "E, G, B, D, A," he muttered. "Yes, it is G. But it doesn't sound right. does it now? Have you any money?" he added, as he repeated the note.

"It should be G sharp, you silly. You've forgotten the key. Of course not. I never have. You had better go back to the D.C., Jim, and play it all over again. I thought perhaps if I gave you my watch you could pawn it for me."

Jim flapped the pages back and started over again in great style. "It would certainly be missed," he remarked.

"Then what am I to do?"

He played an entire page before speaking. and Catherine regarded him intently in silence. She had the utmost confidence in him and knew that whatever he promised he would perform faithfully.

"Let me give you the subscription. I'll take it out for you to-morrow and bring it round next time I come." He attacked a scale passage with great vigour, working up the piece to its conclusion. "You can pay me back some time or other, you know, if you feel you'd rather do so. I'll stand the racket with your mother."

He wound up with a series of resounding chords and rose from the piano.

"Thank you, Jim," said Catherine aloud, and under cover of the sheet of music she touched his hand. "I see how it ought to go now. You've helped me a lot."

"Let's see how the patience is getting on," said Jim, crossing to the card-table. "I believe father's winning! It's very ungallant of him, Miss Kellaway."

"I shall never get the five of spades from under that king," said Mr. Conway gloomily. "And I am only allowed to turn the rubbish-heap once."

Lily Kellaway regarded Jim Conway with a covert smile. "I had no idea you were such a poor reader of music, Mr. Conway," she said maliciously; "I should have thought you could have played that piece at sight."

"Grieg is notoriously difficult to read, Miss Kellaway," protested Jim.

"Especially when one is engaged in conversation at the same time!"

Jim dragged a chair forward and sat down beside the card-table. "If I were you, Father, I should give the rubbish-heap an extra turn," he said. "You never know what might be concealed in it."

"I don't think that would be quite fair," said Mr. Conway doubtfully.

"Now, I put it to you, Miss Kellaway. How could a man be unfair at patience when by the nature of the game he can only be cheating himself?"

She laughed. "On the contrary, self-deception is very common, Mr. Conway. You see, it's so easy!"

Jim lighted a cigarette. "I don't know about it being easy," he said; "I've often tried to cheat myself into the belief that I'm irresistible, but I can't say I've succeeded so far."

Lily Kellaway laughed. "Surely," she replied, "there must be some amongst your feminine acquaintances whom you could induce to take you at your own valuation?"

Jim heaved a mock sentimental sigh. "I haven't succeeded in getting anyone to take me at all," he said; "I believe I shall die an old maid."

"O don't be so pessimistic, Mr. Conway. You haven't asked me yet, you know!"

"What is that Lily says?" asked Mrs. Conway from the fireplace.

"She is just about to propose to me, Mother."

"Jim!"

"O don't worry, Mother. I have no intention of accepting her; she would be much too expensive for my simple tastes!"

"Catherine," said Mrs. Arlsea with sudden asperity, "it is time you went to bed."

Catherine rose. Jim Conway gave her a quick look, and then he also rose.

"It's time we went home to bed too, Mother," he said. "Think of my being deprived of my beauty sleep! We shall have Miss Kellaway withdrawing her offer for my hand!"

" I thought you meant to reject it ? " laughed Lily.

" O well, we had better not do anything rash. A bird in the hand, you know ! "

Mr. Conway gathered up the cards. " That five of spades baulked me," he remarked sadly ; " I knew it would."

Jim Conway saw his people, together with Lily Kellaway, into a West Kensington bus, and then, saying that he preferred to walk, set off homeward on foot, to Miss Kellaway's obvious discontent.

He lighted a pipe and walked slowly, thinking of Catherine Arlsea and her troubles. It seemed to him that she was mentally alone in the world, except for her books. He pictured her life in the little house in Gloucester Road and clenched his hands at the thought of it. For Jim Conway had learned to love the open spaces and the mind unfettered by conventionality out in Queensland, where he had gone, with the optimism of youth, to seek his fortune at the mines ; but where, indeed, he had found little save an independent spirit, the love of a free life and, later, an on-coming lung trouble brought about by the dust amongst which he had laboured. It was after some ten years of colonial life that he had returned home with the object of consulting a specialist. This design he had carried out soon after his return to England, but had divulged to no one the verdict of the doctor. Only he had announced his decision to return to Australia after a short holiday, and to his mother's

remonstrance he had replied that his free life out there had unfitted him for the confined atmosphere of London. His health, too, would benefit by his continuing to lead an open-air existence.

Now, as he walked along the lamp-lit streets, he thought of these things and of Catherine Arlsea, whom he could not ask to share his future as he would wish to have done, but whom he must leave behind to face this barren life of hers alone.

He wondered, had he been in a position to ask her, whether she would have come with him to Australia. He decided that she would probably have done so later on, when he should have set himself to win her regard and when she realized that with him she would be free. A sudden bitterness took his thoughts at the game fate had played. Here was a girl who was unhappy and to whom he could have offered freedom and a home in another land where they could have begun a new life together in happier circumstances. Now—he must go back alone. Alone, he told himself, and for the last time, to find a sleep and a forgetting under the lonely shining of the stars of the Southern Cross.

CHAPTER III

LILY

LILY KELLAWAY was perched on the bed in Catherine's room; she was, as usual, smoking, and kept up a running fire of comments while Catherine dressed to go out with her. She was a short stoutish girl of about twenty-three, with hair that those among her friends who were inclined to candour called red. With this hair went the charming complexion and something of the impertinent manner that so often accompanies it.

Why she had made a friend of Catherine Arlsea, whom she had met at Mrs. Conway's house, was a question that puzzled her acquaintance not a little, and one which, in fact, she had often asked herself. "For she's as solemn as an owl," Lily told a girl friend, "and has a handsome face too, which as a rule I prefer to dispense with in a companion." Perhaps the reason lay in a modification of the first part of this statement. With Lily Kellaway's appreciation of the sound of her own voice, a silent listener, who yet attended and remembered what had been said, was not to be despised. Catherine, on her part, accepted Lily's friendship as she would have that of almost

any other girl, as a means of escape from the parental observation. "You are fortunate in your home," she had once remarked to Lily, to which that damsel had replied off-handedly, "Think so? It's true there are no females about, but uncle's a bit of a corker, especially when funds are extra low."

Lily's uncle, with whom she had lived since the death of her parents, was an insurance agent, and in the small flat at West Kensington where they lived the tide of fortune never rose to any excessive height.

At present this was the very theme of Lily's conversation. She was in want of a new frock, she declared, and the wherewithal was not forthcoming.

Catherine cast a critical eye at the bunch of mauve drapery on the bed, and remarked that the one she was wearing seemed all right.

Lily snorted. "Yes, you would say so," she remarked. "People who can have everything they want always do feel quite satisfied with other folk's things."

"I can't have everything I want."

Lily scented a grievance and sat up. "What do you want that you can't have?" she enquired curiously.

"Mother's stopped the subscription to *Mudies*."

"O, is that all? Well, cheer up; uncle always takes in *Tit-Bits*. I can pass that on to you."

"Thank you," said Catherine drily, "it won't be necessary, I hope."

Lily regarded her inquisitively through a cloud of cigarette smoke. "Is that what you were talking to Jim Conway about?" she asked.

Catherine nodded.

"I heard you say something about pawning your watch"—her eyes went to the dressing-table as she spoke—"but I see it's there. Are you going to give up reading, then?"

"No," said Catherine. "Jim is renewing the subscription for me."

Lily swallowed a mouthful of smoke and choked. "Good Lord!" she coughed, "however did you wangle that, Catherine?"

"I didn't wangle it at all," said Catherine. "Jim offered it."

"And you accepted?"

"Certainly."

"My father, whatever will your mother say? Jim Conway will get it hot, won't he? Fancy your taking money from a strange man!"

"It isn't money, and Jim isn't a strange man."

Lily threw back her head to let a mouthful of smoke escape. "You are a minx!" she chuckled. "You'll be marrying Jim one of these days, I suppose."

Catherine remained grave. "I probably shall, if he asks me," she replied.

"Bet you five shillings he asks me first!"

A smile curved Catherine's lips. "I've no doubt you'll win, if you set yourself to do it," she replied. "Besides, I haven't got five shillings."

"O, you can borrow it from Jim," the irre-

pressible damsel replied. "You seem to be good at it!"

There was a moment's pause while Catherine put on her hat at the mirror, then Lily continued thoughtfully: "I suppose when he marries he'll take his wife to Australia with him. I don't think I should fancy that much."

Catherine left the glass, and seating herself on a chair near the window, began putting on her gloves. "Should you like to be married, Lily?" she asked suddenly.

Lily shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know about liking marriage," she said, "but I'd like a good fat income well enough."

"I meant apart from money."

"I don't mean to marry 'apart from money.'"

"You might fall in love," Catherine suggested.

"Not under a thousand a year, my child; it couldn't be did."

Catherine laughed and then grew thoughtful again. Suddenly she said, "Jim Conway is a just man. And one would be free."

Lily made an impatient gesture. "I don't think women are ever free," she remarked. "The most we can hope for is to be slaves to men, which is natural, and not let ourselves be bullied by a woman, which is intolerable."

"I don't want to be a slave at all."

"You can't help it. Nature decided that for us at birth."

"I think many men are not free either," said

Catherine thoughtfully. "Some are slaves to the making of money, for instance."

"Well, it has its compensations!"

"And some have ill-health. I believe Jim Conway is not very strong. He looks so tired sometimes."

"It's better to be anything than a woman," was Lily's decision.

"Yes," said Catherine; "O yes, I quite agree with you there."

"I wish I were a man," pursued Lily; "there's very little I wouldn't sample, I can tell you that. And there's one thing certain: I wouldn't let any woman boss me. The man who allows his wife to get the upper hand is a fool."

"You wouldn't think so if you were the wife in question, Lily."

"Yes, I should. I should despise any man who allowed me to rule him. Though, of course, I shall try it on!" she added with a grin.

She got down from her perch on the bed, flung the end of her cigarette into the fireplace and shook out her skirts. "Come on out, Kitty," she said, "it's getting late. Let's go up to High Street and see the shops. They've got a sale on at Derby and Holmes' and I must have some new things, especially if I'm going to set about winning that five shillings!"

They set off by way of Palace Gate, Lily talking fast about chiffon and ribbons, Catherine silent and inattentive. When they came in sight of the Gardens, the latter said suddenly, "Lily, I

want you to go shopping without me. I want to go into the park by myself."

Lily stared. "You are the oddest kid," she remarked. "Whatever for?"

"The chestnuts are in bloom, and—O well, I want to be alone."

"How polite! And whatever would your mother say if she knew I left you? She'd never let you go out with me again."

Catherine shrugged her shoulders. "The more reason why I shouldn't tell her," she said carelessly.

Lily, after arguing the point for a few moments, gave in. She decided that Catherine in her present taciturn mood would be more of a nuisance than anything else in the crowded shops; besides which, she found it rather a joke to deceive Mrs. Arlsea; so having arranged with Catherine to meet her again in an hour's time, she left her.

Catherine entered the Broad Walk and turned aside among the trees. She walked slowly over the freshly springing grass, her head bent and her hands clasped loosely behind her back. The unaccustomed sensation of being out of doors and alone drew her to a kind of fearful joy. She paused underneath a chestnut-tree and peered up at its flat green leaves and the thick spikes of flowers, set at regular intervals like waxen candles on a Christmas-tree. It struck her fancifully as odd that a tree with apparent freedom to grow as it listed should assume a form so symmetrical. Her mind revolved round the idea, perceiving

that every living thing had its appointed form and was limited by the mould proper to it. And as in the material world, so too with the world of thought. Every mind had its limitations imposed upon it by its inheritance, even although it might be warped by the direction of another mind pressing upon it, much as trees become misshapen by the too close proximity of their neighbours.

In her own case, she felt within herself the mind inheritance received from her father. Robert Arlsea had been at heart a poet. This she knew, although he had left no written word, and knowing it to be so, she felt that there was here a possibility for herself.

She moved forward from beneath the trees into the open space about the Round Pond, and lifting her eyes, gazed up at the wonder of an early summer sky, its intense azure piled high with heaped-up cloud forms, dazzling in their whiteness.

And suddenly the knowledge came to her that she must try to bring to life the thought that had been Robert Arlsea's. Her father's life had been cut short, its promise unfulfilled: his soul it was that had given birth to hers, whose life she had inherited. All that he had left for the world was in her keeping: a charge that she must seek out the way to fulfil.

She turned her head and looked back at the symmetrical beauty of the chestnuts, their vivid leaves outstretched like the open fingers of a hand. It seemed that after all there was work for her in the world. She must labour to teach herself to

write, and the spirit of Robert Arlsea which was within her would show her what to say.

Clasping her hands tightly, she lifted her eyes from the gleaming white of the chestnut flowers to the snow of the heaped-up cloud forms, and her heart lifted itself to their song. "Father," she whispered, "I hear, I understand, I will be faithful."

CHAPTER IV

BLUFF

JIM CONWAY paid the quarterly subscription to Mudies' in Catherine's name, and with the receipt in his pocket went round to Gloucester Road.

Mrs. Arlsea was in, and the maid added that Miss Catherine was out walking with Miss Kellaway.

Mrs. Arlsea was in the dining-room, engaged in cutting out a frock. She looked up in surprise and some slight annoyance as he entered. She disliked Jim Conway, though she would not willingly have admitted as much ; and still less would she have cared to own that she disliked him because she feared him. She disparaged him to Catherine whenever opportunity offered, and had been heard to remark that he had " a very sarcastic mouth."

Jim drew a chair to the table at which she was working and sat down. He was perfectly aware of this attitude towards himself, and regarded it with scornful amusement.

" I should like a few moments' talk with you, Mrs. Arlsea," he began, " if you have leisure to speak with me."

Mrs. Arlsea raised her brows. " What have you to say ? " she asked with a certain insolence. " I am going out to tea."

Jim took an envelope from his pocket and laid it on the table before him. "I will not detain you long," he said calmly. "I want your permission to make Catherine a small present."

Mrs. Arlsea stared. "Make Catherine a present? Of what, may I ask?"

"Of a quarter's subscription to Mudies' library," said Jim concisely.

Mrs. Arlsea flushed angrily. "Thank you," she answered. "I do not intend that Catherine shall continue her reading at present. She is straining her eyes."

Jim nodded. "So I understand. I heard from my mother that you had come to this decision, and that is why I am here."

Mrs. Arlsea's flush deepened.

"I am perfectly well able to pay for Catherine," she said, "should I wish to do so."

"I quite understand that, and my motive in bringing this to you is merely to get your acceptance of it for Catherine. You can refund me the money, should you care to do so."

"Really! You are very obliging. May I enquire what right you have to interfere in any way between my daughter and myself?"

"This is right: that I hope one day to ask Catherine to be my wife."

The words were received by Mrs. Arlsea in amazed silence, and Jim went on:

"I don't care that my future wife should be denied the means of education, should she desire it."

Mrs. Arlsea found her voice.

"You are exceedingly impertinent to dare to speak to me like this," she said. "My daughter is not yet eighteen, and at present her place is with her mother. I do not intend that she shall marry for years. I do not approve of girls marrying young, and she shall at no time marry anyone whom I do not consider suitable."

Jim leaned back in his chair and regarded her, unperturbed and with a smile lurking at the corners of his mouth.

"It is quite true that Catherine may not care to marry me," he replied. "That I have yet to prove. But the decision rests entirely with her. However," he added quietly, "that is not a matter that we need discuss at present. Just now it is merely a question of a library subscription. I must again request you to allow Catherine to continue her reading."

Mrs. Arlsea rose from her chair with a glint in her eyes and walked towards the bell.

"I must request you to leave my house," she said.

Jim remained seated.

"I am quite anxious to do so," he replied, "when I have finished what I have to say. But I think you had better understand that if you refuse to do as I ask you I shall wait outside for Miss Arlsea, who, I understand, is out walking, and I shall ask her to marry me at once. It is true she may refuse. But I think she will not."

Mrs. Arlsea had stopped by the fireplace. The colour had left her face and she spoke sharply.

"I think you are out of your senses, Jim Conway," she said. "You must be mad with egotism!"

Jim's smile deepened. "O no," he said. "Not at all. I quite see that I am no great match. But I could offer Miss Arlsea a home of her own—in Australia. And I am a gentleman."

"O indeed!" sneered Mrs. Arlsea. "One would never suppose it from your conduct this afternoon."

Jim ignored the remark.

"I could also offer her something else," he continued. "Something that, situated as she is, I think she will not be slow to value."

"Indeed, may I ask what that is?"

Jim turned his head and looked her steadily in the face.

"Freedom," he said.

"This is insufferable!" exclaimed Mrs. Arlsea. "Do you think I will endure to hear such threats? If you dare to breathe a word of such a matter to my daughter I will put the matter in the hands of my solicitor."

Jim shrugged his shoulders.

"By the time he had discovered our address," he remarked coolly, "it would be rather late to interfere, don't you think?"

Mrs. Arlsea stood speechless. There was a moment's silence in the room. Then Jim Conway

rose, tapping the envelope on the table with the back of his hand as he did so.

"Come, Mrs. Arlsea," he said. "I think you understand me. Your daughter has an entirely reasonable and praiseworthy desire to study. All I ask of you is that she may be allowed to do so within reason. If you will give your consent to this I make no further claim—for the present. And I will, of course, undertake to say nothing to your daughter of what has passed between us. If, on the other hand, I find that you still continue to prohibit Catherine's reading, I shall settle the matter for myself and in the manner I have warned you."

He turned to the door and was about to open it, when Mrs. Arlsea spoke.

"Wait, please," she said in stifled tones. "I do not choose to be indebted to you. I will get my purse."

With an expressionless face Jim opened the door and stood aside while she left the room and ascended the stairs. Just as she was returning, purse in hand, the hall door opened, and Catherine, entering, came towards the dining-room, followed by Lily Kellaway.

Mrs. Arlsea passed in front of her daughter and, approaching Jim, handed him the money. "Here is what I owe you, Mr. Conway," she said in clear hard tones. "Good afternoon."

"That is quite correct, Mrs. Arlsea," said Jim. He took out a flat leather purse and slowly and deliberately placed the coins in it. Then he

turned to Catherine, who had stopped outside the door and was gazing at him anxiously, Lily Kellaway's inquisitive face showing behind her shoulder.

"Your mother has commissioned me to take out your next quarter's library subscription for you, Catherine," he said. "I have left the receipt on the table, Mrs. Arlsea. Good afternoon."

Catherine raised her clasped hands. "O Mother," she exclaimed with shining eyes, "thank you!" Mrs. Arlsea looked away.

"Good-bye, Catherine," said Jim. He crossed the hall and then turned to Lily. "You haven't fixed the happy day yet, Miss Lily!" he said. "Shall we have tea at Buszard's one afternoon and discuss the matter? I hear the ices are a dream!"

Laughingly they fixed an afternoon and Jim departed.

Once out of sight of the house all his assurance vanished.

He felt all at once very tired and old. He reflected with grim sarcasm that he had now secured to himself Mrs. Arlsea's undying hatred, and he very well knew how malicious and how dangerous such dislike in the mind of a vain and ignorant woman could be. He laughed again, a bitter, mirthless laugh, as he thought how in a short time, probably within the year, he would be beyond the reach of human malice.

His thoughts returned to Catherine and his face

grew grave. Her life was almost a tragedy. As far as Jim could see, her one hope lay in matrimony—a false and dangerous position for any girl. With such a home-life as hers the chances indeed were that Catherine would marry the first man who asked her, in order to get away. And what guarantee was there that such a marriage would not be a worse disaster than the existing state of things?

Catherine was a girl of exceptional character, certainly; but, brought up as she was in complete ignorance of the world, how was she going to recognize false coin when she saw it, and how perceive that there could be worse and more stultifying lives than the one she was at present leading? Who was there to warn her of the evils that an unsuitable marriage might hold?

He thought of his mother, and dismissed the thought with a petulant shrug and an uncomplimentary reflection on mothers in general. His sisters were far off and immersed in their own concerns. Lily Kellaway, the only girl-friend Catherine had, was an absurdity. He supposed Mrs. Arlsea countenanced the friendship on the grounds that she was too frivolous to be dangerous.

Suddenly he came to a bold decision. If he could find no other way he must take the office upon himself. It was unconventional, to say the least of it, that he, a man of little more than Catherine's own age, should discuss these matters with her. He brushed the reflection impatiently aside, telling himself that he cared nothing for

convention and that the only thing that mattered was that Catherine should not be hurt in the telling or receive a shock. He knew she trusted him and that whatever he told her would be accepted by her in good faith and with ready confidence. He must carefully think over what he should say and choose the gentlest possible words in which to say it.

Meanwhile, there was the difficulty of getting Catherine alone. She was never allowed out alone, and in future Mrs. Arlsea would take especial care that no meeting should take place between her daughter and himself. He thought again at this point of Lily Kellaway.

It might be made worth that astute damsel's while to intrigue for him. He evolved a plan to arrange a meeting and to provide her with other quarry, and mentally selected an acquaintance of his own—one Norman Swaine—as the man for the job.

Swaine was an actor by profession. He was good-looking, had a fine voice and a love of dramatic situations. A word or two from Jim and he would be quite game. Lily Kellaway could bring Catherine to the Gardens to meet them and then get off on Norman. They would make a very suitable pair.

CHAPTER V

NORMAN SWAINE

DINNER was over at the Conways' and Norman Swaine was seated at table on the opposite side to Jim Conway, and the two were engaged in conversation over their coffee and cigarettes.

The light from a crimson-shaded lamp swinging low over the table fell on Norman's head and touched Jim's clear features and greying hair to a silvery radiance against the dusky background of the wall. Seen from Jim's position in front, Norman Swaine was undoubtedly handsome. He was a very large man, some six feet in height and broad in proportion. His colouring was unusually dark for an Englishman. His hair was black, and the red-shaded light shining on him from above caused his eyes to appear also black. Those of Swaine's friends who had seen him angry noticed that a reddish light gleamed in the depths of these eyes and wisely avoided the provocative in argument.

On the stage Norman was usually cast for the military hero type of character, and frequent impersonations of this rôle had given him something of military characteristics in everyday life.

Men were apt to shrug their shoulders when his name was mentioned: they either glanced side-

ways at him or damned him with the monosyllable "swank." Women, on the other hand, adored him.

They took him at his face value and omitted to notice that the back of his head was lacking in curve: women of his own class, that is to say, for there were those in lower social grades who might have had a different tale to tell.

Just now he was at his best, for the Conways kept a good table within the limit of their means: their cook was an expert at making coffee; and Jim, with an eye to Swaine's propitiation, had provided a supply of chartreuse. Norman was leaning back in his chair, his handsome face pale against the reddish shadow cast by the shaded light, a tall liqueur-glass full of the emerald liquid held aloft in his hand.

"By Jove!" he was saying. "That's a fine colour. Reminds me of an emerald I used to wear when I played in 'The Sign of the Cross.' Lucky I'm not a woman; I should make a perfect guy of myself with beads and jewelry. I never could resist colour."

Jim raised his head and smiled a little across the white tablecloth, his thin face in striking contrast to Norman's virile one. "You must have been rather fine in that Roman get-up, Swaine," he said.

"Yes. They had some taste in dress in those days. I never can put on my boots without a sigh for those high-laced crimson ones. I used to wear the get-up at the flat under pretence of

having to get used to it—in reality, because the colours were so splendid.”

Jim laughed. “And nowadays you can’t even wear a red tie without looking like an anarchist or a railway porter! Poor old Swaine!”

Swaine made a laughing reference to the highly coloured dressing-gowns worn by himself and his friend Martin, with whom he shared a flat.

“The sofa cushions were what attracted me at your place,” said Jim; “and that green and blue stuffed parrot.”

“Martin’s sister embroidered the cushions,” said Norman. “They’re rather classy. But we’ve lost the parrot. The cat belonging to the people above got in one afternoon and ate it!”

Jim threw back his head to laugh. “It must have been a tasty morsel,” he remarked. “How long had it been there?”

“O, I don’t know—two or three years, anyhow. We collected the feathers afterwards and used them for pipe-cleaners.”

There was a moment’s silence whilst Norman helped himself to another cigarette, lighting it slowly from the butt of the first.

“I gathered you wanted to see me about something, Conway,” he said abruptly.

Jim flicked a speck of ash from his sleeve. “Nothing very serious,” he answered, smiling. “Merely that I want you to come up to tea in Kensington Gardens one afternoon.”

Norman raised his brows. “So ho!” he ejaculated. “Who’s the lady?”

Jim smiled. "Yours, for the occasion, is a Miss Kellaway," he said.

"Kellaway? That's a girl I saw with Mrs. Conway one afternoon at Lord's. I believe her name was Kellaway. Red-haired girl in a pale green frock. Looks a bit of a rip."

"Yes, that's the girl—Lily Kellaway. She's a friend of my people and lives near here with an old uncle. She's quite entertaining; you'll find her rather a sport."

"And you, meantime——?"

Jim hesitated. He wondered how much he should tell Swaine, whom he, in common with a good many other men, did not wholly trust.

"Do you know the Arlseas?" he asked.

Norman shook his head.

"They are mother and daughter," Jim continued.

"They live in Gloucester Road. Mrs. Arlsea was at school with my mother, though of course she's years younger. She is a widow. Miss Arlsea is about eighteen." He paused, realizing again that he did not care to talk of Catherine.

"They must be well off if they can live in Gloucester Road." Norman was regarding Jim with a glint of amusement in his black eyes. He wondered whether it was the mother or the daughter Conway was after.

"Well off?" said Jim. "O yes, I suppose they are. Mrs. Arlsea is very strict—unreasonably so, in my opinion. She won't let her daughter go out alone; but she and Miss Kellaway often go to the Gardens together."

"Ah, I see daylight! This is where I come in."

"Well, yes, Swaine. The fact is, I want to talk to Miss Arlsea about something and I can never manage to see her alone."

"So I am to be offered up as a sacrifice at the shrine of the orange lily, eh?"

"Of course, if you'd rather not take it on——"

"I! O bless you, I'll take anything on. She'll talk, I suppose?"

"Talk?" Jim laughed. "O yes, she'll talk all right. It's easier to get her to talk than to stop."

"I'll take my chance of stopping her," laughed Swaine. "I suppose you'll tell me this affair of yours is purely platonic?"

"No," said Jim. "I'll tell you nothing of the sort. You wouldn't believe me if I did."

"I don't suppose I should," said Norman, with a grin. "I've heard a lot about platonic friendships, but I never met with one yet."

He lifted the glass of liqueur to the light, letting his black eyes rest on the vivid little globe of colour. "Is she handsome?" he asked.

"Who? Miss Kellaway?"

"No, I know she isn't. You forget I've seen her."

"I thought you would not remember her."

"My dear chap, I never forget a woman's face." Swaine touched the liqueur with his lips. "It's one of the things you acquire by being on the boards," he added. "You never

need remember a name; you just call 'em all 'dear,' but it's up to you to remember the colour of their hair, even if it changes twice a year, which it not infrequently does. Is this Miss Arlsea fair?"

"Medium. She is a very reserved girl. Not your style, Swaine."

"All right," laughed Swaine, "I won't poach on your preserve. And I don't like 'em solemn. Life's too short to spend time in breaking down reserve. I always want to be getting on with it."

He finished his liqueur as he spoke, and Jim, rising, proposed that they should go into the drawing-room. "My mother will want you to sing something, Swaine," he said.

Norman rose. "You'll let me know about the tea party?" he asked. "Not Wednesday or Saturday, you know, on account of the *matinée*."

Jim nodded. "I'll see the Kellaway girl," he said, "and fix it up."

Crossing the hall, he opened the drawing-room door and motioned to Swaine to enter. "Go in," he said; "I want to post this note." He took a letter from his pocket, and with it in his hand he went slowly down the road to the pillar-box at the corner.

His mind was troubled. He wondered again if he were doing well in bringing about this meeting. Norman Swaine was not a man to be made a pawn of. To be sure, he would lightly agree to any scheme that offered him amusement for an idle hour; but once embarked on the enterprise he

would be apt to take the rudder into his hands and steer his own course. If Lily Kellaway could hold him amused when they met, well and good ; but Swaine was, as Jim reflected, used to girls of Lily's stamp. How if he found an attraction in the unaccustomed reticence of Catherine's demeanour ? He was just the man to catch the imagination of a girl like Catherine, who had been brought up in a life of entire seclusion and ignorance of the world.

Well, there was the more reason for his effort to make Catherine understand the dangers of her position.

Jim posted his letter and slowly retraced his steps. As he neared the house his ear caught the sound of the piano, played with considerable vigour. Norman was singing. The song was from Landon Ronald's "Cycle of Life," and as Jim entered the hall Norman's fine baritone burst out into a cataract of notes that seemed to fill the house and send eddies of sound swirling round the dimly lighted hall.

Now that I have you and hold you,
Life has no more to give.
It is summer—it is summer ;
Come, let us live !

The words rang out in overwhelming force and virility, and Jim Conway stood quite still listening to them, the light from the solitary lamp above him falling on his grey hair and the tired face beneath it.

A quotation from "King John" came into his mind :

You breathe these dead words in as dead an ear.

Norman Swaine, he told himself, was at least a man, and, however lacking in ideals he might be, there was nothing weakly about him. And in the end life was for those who knew how to hold the helm against the beating of the waters, not to him whose hand was falling nerveless from the tiller.

He stirred and opened the drawing-room door, entered, and closed it behind him.

CHAPTER VI

MRS. CONWAY GIVES ADVICE

As Jim Conway had supposed, the interview between himself and Mrs. Arlsea had left the latter full of impotent anger and an intense bitterness of hatred towards himself. Like most bullies, Mrs. Arlsea was at heart a coward, and she knew that there was no hope of making any impression on Jim. She vented as much spleen as she dared upon Catherine; but she did not venture to say anything openly about the interview, because Catherine must on no account be allowed to guess either that Jim had spoken of her with any special liking or that she herself had been worsted in the affair of the subscription. So all she could do to assuage her indignation was to be a little more unreasonable than usual in the exercise of her authority, and Catherine, supposing that Jim had engineered her into taking out the subscription, made allowance for her mother's irritability the more gladly that she could now return to the society of her beloved books.

One afternoon, while she was seated with her mother in the drawing-room engaged in trying to master some rule of composition and at the

same time to give proper attention to Mrs. Arlsea's comment on the price of strawberries, Mrs. Conway was announced.

It occurred to Mrs. Arlsea that here was an opportunity to get a little of her own back on Jim; so when he was nearly over she told Catherine to take her books to her room, adding that she could then read undisturbed by their talk.

Catherine smiled at this sudden zeal for her studies, but gladly took her books, said good-bye to Mrs. Arlsea, and went.

"I am glad to see you this afternoon, Agnes," began Mrs. Arlsea, when the door was shut, "because I want to speak to you about Jim."

"Dear me, Susan," said Mrs. Conway, helping herself to a piece of iced cake. "What has Jim been doing?"

"He has been behaving in a most impertinent manner."

"I am sorry for that," said Mrs. Conway composedly. "That's good cake, Susan—where do you get it?"

"Cardellions—and I am speaking of Jim."

"So I heard. I can't help what Jim does. He's old enough to look after himself."

"But I will not stand his being impertinent to me, Agnes. If it happens again I shall refuse to have him in the house."

Mrs. Conway held out her cup. "Thank you, dear; just half a cup more, if you can spare it," she said.

Mrs. Arlsea filled the cup and handed it back in silence, and Mrs. Conway continued:

"There's no use getting put out with Jim: he takes it all as it comes. And he's very obstinate. I did all I could to prevent his returning to the Colonies. But he would go."

"He's welcome to go to the Colonies," said Mrs. Arlsea rudely. "But I don't intend that Catherine shall go with him."

"What?" said Mrs. Conway. Her start of surprise sent a bit of cake flying off her saucer to the floor, and the effort of stooping to pick it up seemed to make her face very red.

Mrs. Arlsea regarded her narrowly. The thought had occurred to her that perhaps the proposed offer for Catherine's hand was a prearranged affair between mother and son. Catherine would be well off some day and the Conways were not too rich.

Mrs. Conway deposited the bit of cake in the saucer again and stirred her tea, keeping her eyes on the cup. She, too, reflected that some day Catherine would be well off. Perhaps Jim was not such a fool over money matters as she had always believed him to be.

"My son is a gentleman," she remarked at last, with a non-committal air.

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Arlsea rudely, "and what has that got to do with it?"

"A great deal, I suppose, if he is going to marry your daughter."

"He is not going to marry my daughter."

"O, I thought you said he was!"

"I said he had the impudence to propose it, which is quite another matter."

"I doubt if it is. I have noticed that what Jim proposes he usually carries into effect."

"You forget there is someone else to be consulted."

"O well," said Mrs. Conway judiciously, "Jim is a nice chap; and Catherine——"

"I was not referring to Catherine. I was referring to myself."

Mrs. Conway regarded her rather maliciously. "He hasn't made you an offer of marriage, my dear, has he?" she enquired. "I thought you said it was Catherine?"

"Of course, Agnes, if you've come here to insult me——" Mrs. Arlsea's face was very red.

"I have not. You began it by disparaging my son."

"It would appear that your son is not too much of a gentleman to be a fortune-hunter. Catherine is not yet eighteen——"

"And therefore has no fortune," put in Mrs. Conway.

"Not yet; but of course when she is twenty-one she will come into half of her father's money."

Mrs. Conway pricked her ears. "Is that so?" she asked eagerly; "I didn't know that."

Mrs. Arlsea bit her lip. She perceived at once that in attacking Jim she had been betrayed into an indiscretion. "I'll thank you not to mention that to anyone, Agnes," she said. "No one knows

of it here, least of all Catherine herself. She believes herself to be entirely dependent upon me, and it is my wish that she should continue to do so. She is not yet eighteen——”

“Three years——” murmured Mrs. Conway dreamily.

Mrs. Arlsea turned on her sharply.

“Look here, Agnes. I don’t intend that Catherine shall marry. At any rate, not for years. I’ve got no one to keep me company but her, and it is her duty to stay with her mother.”

Mrs. Conway shrugged her shoulders. “Well,” she said, “I suppose you’ve told Jim all this, haven’t you? You say he spoke to you about it. He has not told me anything of what passed between you, and I certainly could not influence him if he had—even supposing I wanted to.”

She rose and deposited her cup on the tray and then returned to her seat.

“Let me give you a bit of advice, Susan,” she said. “You are making a mistake with regard to your treatment of Catherine. It’s true she is very quiet and docile now; but the quiet girls are just those with whom one may readily go too far. Catherine is possessed of no ordinary intelligence. One has only to look at her eyes to see that. If you go on pulling at the reins as you are doing, mark my words, the girl will jib. And when she does take the bit between her teeth—well, she will require some holding up.”

“My dear Agnes, this is very unnecessary.

You had much better look after your son and let my daughter alone."

"The least that will happen," pursued Mrs. Conway, "is that Catherine will fall a victim to the first man who makes love to her; and if the man happens to be my Jim, well, all I can say is you may think yourself lucky—and Catherine too. The Johnsons kept their daughters like moles in a molehill and Lucy Johnson ran away with a married man. And the Grantly girl—well, you know what happened to her."

"This is all very vulgar, Agnes"—Mrs. Arlsea was tapping her foot impatiently. "Catherine is a quite different type of girl from those you are speaking of."

"In what way is she different? She has more brains, certainly; but I never knew brains to make any difference when it comes to falling in love. In fact, it complicates matters, because it makes girls more clever in cunning."

"I'll thank you to remember you are speaking of my daughter."

"Even your daughter probably has a heart, Susan—strange as it may appear!"

Mrs. Arlsea did not deign to answer. She rose and began, rather ostentatiously, putting together the teacups.

Mrs. Conway watched her for some moments in silence. Then she said, "I'll speak to Jim this evening, and hear what he has to say. But you may take it from me that I have never known him do anything dishonourable."

Mrs. Arlsea snorted. "If you don't consider it dishonourable to come here and threaten me——"

"Threaten?"

"Yes, threaten. I told him plainly that if he tried to entangle my daughter I would put the matter in the hands of a solicitor."

Mrs. Conway suddenly laughed. "Come now, Susan!" she said. "You couldn't expect him to be very gracious after that! Could you?"

Mrs. Arlsea gave her an angry glance. "I see nothing to laugh at," she said. "I am determined that Catherine shall not be married at present, and certainly not to Jim Conway, and if he is set on outwitting me——"

"In that case, I back Jim!" said Mrs. Conway flippantly; "or should do, if I were a betting man. Come, Susan, let the young people settle it for themselves. They will probably do so, you know, whether we allow them to or not."

She rose. "I will speak to Jim, as I promised, and tell him that you are annoyed. What time are you going to the Kellaway's on Friday?"

"What is all this about you and Catherine?" Mrs. Conway asked Jim that evening.

Jim, who was watching his father's invariable evening game of patience, looked up.

"About me and Catherine Arlsea, Mother?"

"Yes. Susan Arlsea is in a fine taking about it. Have you been making love to Catherine?"

Jim came over and sat beside his mother, who

was knitting on the sofa. "What did Mrs. Arlsea say?" he asked.

Mrs. Conway related what had taken place.

"You seem to have had the better of it, Mother!" Jim laughed.

"O anyone could get the better of Susan," replied Mrs. Conway. "She has no intelligence to speak of. But I'm afraid you've put her back up rather badly, Jim. I don't think she will forgive you in a hurry for whatever it is you said."

"I can stand that," said Jim carelessly. "But I hope all this won't make things worse for Catherine," he added.

"That girl will get some of her own back one day, Jim. You mark my words."

Jim took up a skein of wool and began drawing it through his fingers.

"Mother," he said suddenly, "could you not speak to Catherine?"

"About what, my dear?"

"O well, about things in general and marriage in particular."

Mrs. Conway made an impatient gesture.

"There's no good talking to girls," she said; "they always think they know so much more than their elders. Besides, they are much better left in ignorance. How many girls do you think would ever marry at all if they knew what they were really up against?"

"The same number as do now, I expect. It's nature."

"Don't be indecent, Jim."

"I didn't know I was," said Jim with a short laugh. "Any way," he added seriously, "I think someone should speak to Catherine."

"Catherine must look after herself," said Mrs. Conway. "I never told your sisters anything about marriage; and look at them."

"I am," said Jim tersely.

He laid down the wool and left the room, and Mrs. Conway heard him take his stick from the hall stand and the shutting of the hall door.

She rose and glanced at the clock, reflecting, as she put away her knitting, that, as she anticipated, she hadn't got anything out of Jim about his intentions with regard to Catherine after all.

CHAPTER VII

KENSINGTON GARDENS

FOR some of us Kensington Gardens with its iron railings, the hum of distant traffic and the crying of peacocks down by the grey-blue waters of the Serpentine, is a more romantic haven than ever blue lake or trackless moorland can be to us in after-years. For where our youth was, there will our romance be also, and though we may have the finest steam yacht on the Mediterranean or motor at will through the flower-strewn valleys of the Austrian Tyrol, yet our hearts will still be gladdened by the cheep of the London sparrow and the sight of the smutty fleeces of the sheep as they wander from one enclosure to another beneath the sweeping branches of the chestnuts.

Catherine Arlsea thought vaguely of these things as she stood with Lily Kellaway awaiting the arrival of Jim Conway and his friend.

Her dark eyes wandered thoughtfully from the gaily coloured parasols dotted like gigantic agarics round about the tea-gardens away to the distant grey-blue water, and she thought how like her own life it was, with its avenues of formal trees and well-kept paths, all of it surrounded by the high iron railings from beyond which came the sounds

of the life of the world. She wondered if that life held any hope of love or freedom for her, and what there might be awaiting her outside the iron railings in the living world of men.

Catherine's thoughts were interrupted by the sound of Jim's voice.

"Here you are then," he said. "I am sorry if we are late. Catherine, may I introduce Mr. Swaine to you?"

Catherine raised her eyes and met Norman Swaine's piercing glance. For a moment they looked full at one another, Swaine with unconcealed curiosity, Catherine with a sudden sensation akin to fear. For as she looked into his dark bold face against the green background of the chestnuts it seemed to her that the question she had just asked of life was perhaps answered.

Then Norman bowed silently and turned to greet Lily Kellaway, with whom he seemed to be instantly at home. They entered into a bantering argument over the hour of meeting, Norman maintaining that Lily's watch was fast, she that he and Jim were late and that "it was better to be fast than slow."

They found a table under one of the flaming parasols and sat round it, Norman beside Lily and Jim opposite with Catherine, who seemed in a dream and was even more silent than usual. Jim, seeing that this was the case, refrained from talking to her, and she sat listening to the chatter of the others, and every now and then raising her eyes to Swaine's dark face. Norman was in high

spirits: he teased Lily and chaffed Jim, but did not address Catherine, whose quick glances were, however, by no means lost upon him. He thought she was handsome but unformed—too young; might have something in her or might not; one couldn't tell.

He saw that she was interested in himself, and being quite used to excite interest in women, regarded the fact with amused tolerance. Once only their eyes met across the table, and Catherine's fell before his bold glance, which seemed to penetrate like steel. She felt something that was akin to physical pain at that moment, and she leaned back in her chair and lifted her eyes to the clouds passing across the deep blue sky, far up beyond the crimson parasol under which they sat. Norman had ordered strawberries, and insisted on threading a dozen or so of the largest on a stout grass bent as a decoration for Lily's hat. He said they made such a jolly splash of colour against the green chiffon, and in answer to Lily's remonstrance that they would be sure to stain it, he laughingly promised a chaplet of roses that he had worn with his Roman dress, adding that she must come to the flat to tea one day and choose for herself.

Catherine threw him another glance. She seemed suddenly to see him as a young Roman patrician, in the sweeping folds of the toga, his chaplet aslant on his black hair, his eyes flashing across the wine.

Norman caught the glance. "By Jove," he thought, "the girl may have something in her

after all ! " But he did not speak to her, and when tea was over he suggested to Lily that they should go down to the Serpentine and contemplate the peacocks.

Catherine and Jim sat down under a big chestnut-tree, Catherine following Swaine's upright figure with her eyes.

" He looks like a soldier," she said.

" He's played a great many military parts," answered Jim. " It becomes a habit, I suppose."

Catherine was silent for a moment, dreamily watching the tall brown-clad figure bending to the short green one as they disappeared amongst the trees. Then she turned to Jim.

" I want to thank you about the books," she said.

" You are allowed to read ? " asked Jim.

" Yes. Mother does not like it, but she has not tried to stop me since the day you came."

" You will have to be firm about it, Catherine, even if you give in over other things."

Catherine sighed. " I am always giving in," she said.

Jim felt the hopelessness in the words. He looked quickly at her, but her face was turned upwards to the green branches above them.

" I think," he said quietly, " that there is a great art in knowing when to give in. In your place you would do well to make up your mind just what things are precious to you, and then hold on to them till the death and let all the rest go."

Catherine's eyes fell and she turned her face to him. He was surprised at the pain he saw in their grey depths.

"Till the death," she said dreamily. Then: "Jim, tell me, do you think we are ever really free?"

Jim shook his head. "No," he said, "for we are all bound to the wheel of destiny and must go with it as it turns."

Catherine nodded. "Men as well as women," she said, "I see that. But girls are so terribly fettered in their lives. I think they are the worst off of all."

"That, I believe, is a mistake, Catherine. You must remember that they have no responsibilities. Freedom brings responsibility, paradoxical as it may appear."

"How can that be?"

Jim traced a little pattern on the ground with his stick.

"Some day you will be free to marry," he said with apparent irrelevance.

"Not if mother can prevent it," said Catherine with sudden bitterness.

Jim was startled; he realized that Catherine's docility was more apparent than real. "She can't," he said quickly. "You must not allow her to."

Catherine made an impotent gesture.

Jim's manner became more earnest. He ceased to draw with his stick, and leaning back, regarded her intently.

"Listen, Catherine," he said. "It is one of the things above all others that you must never let go of—the right to choose your husband. You must never allow yourself to be forced into marrying anyone you do not love."

Catherine had coloured a little, but her eyes were steady.

Jim went on, speaking low and earnestly. "The discomforts you suffer now," he said, "would be as nothing compared to the misery you would endure if you married without love."

"One would at any rate be free."

"There you make the biggest mistake possible. No bonds are so compelling and no responsibilities so heavy as those made by the ties of marriage. Indeed, they seem to me so great that only the greatest love and powers of self-sacrifice could make them bearable at all, as far as the woman is concerned."

Catherine's thoughts went to her father. "And what of the man?" she asked.

"The man has more to interest him in life. He goes out each day into the world, where he faces other and different problems. The woman who marries ill or makes a mistake loses all that the world has to offer. That is why I asked you to meet me here to-day."

Catherine's eyes widened. "Was it to tell me this?" she asked.

"Yes. It seemed to me probable that you would make the mistake that you apparently are making: of thinking that marriage will set all

right and therefore accepting the first man who asks you."

"Isn't this rather strange of you, Jim?"

He turned again to her, his face very grave.

"My dear, you must forgive me. There seemed to be no one else to speak. And by and by I shall be gone."

"Gone?"

Jim caught his breath a little. "You know I am going out to Queensland again," he said quickly. "I could not go without knowing that I had tried to help you."

Catherine was silent for a moment; then she said quietly, "What do you wish me to understand?"

"That because marriage is so obvious a way out you must not leap at the chance it seems to offer. My sisters are both married. I must not take it upon me to say they married to escape the monotony of their lives. But Marion has wealth; and Clara has a fool. Does it seem to you that you would care to stand in the shoes of either of them?"

"No."

"I thought not. And whereas my sisters are content with mediocrity, you would not be so. You are of the type of woman who seeks the highest ideal and so often has been broken in missing it."

Catherine's lips twitched. "I am utterly ignorant," she said simply.

"Yes. Otherwise there would be no need for my words."

"Tell me, Jim, what is it you fear so much?"

"I fear that in your eagerness to escape your present bondage you will fall into a worse case. Freedom to choose brings with it the responsibility of choice."

"How can I be guided when my judgment is not trained?"

"I think you must follow that which your instinct tells you. Never go to any man whom you do not respect; nor to any who seems to you capable of a mean or unjust action. Rather remain as you are for always."

Catherine was silent. Then she asked hesitatingly, "Jim, must you go away?"

Jim winced a little. "Yes, dear, I must go. For, you see, I am not free either. My bondage is not the same as yours—it is quite different; but it is bondage for all that."

"Could you tell me of it?"

Jim took off his hat and passed his hand over his head like one in pain. "I could not now do so," he said; "but one day you will know."

"Will it be long before I may know, Jim?"

"No. I think not long."

A silence fell on them. The shadows on the grass were lengthening, the hum of life around them seemed to grow fainter. From down by the water's edge came the cry of the peacocks.

"Jim," said Catherine suddenly, "you know I have never spoken to you of my father."

"I know. I thought you would rather not."

"It is not that. I wished to, often. But I find it hard to speak of him without tears. He

was not at all old when he died. Not much older than you are now, I think. And his was a wasted life."

He made a gesture of pain. "Don't say that, Catherine," he said.

She bowed her head. "I know that it was so," she said, speaking very low. "There are so many things that I did not understand then. But I see their meaning now."

She locked her hands tightly together, looking away from him towards the distant water. Then she began to tell him of her father's life and thought, of the poetry of mind that had never found its expression, of their love for one another, of his early death, and finally of the idea that had come to her a few weeks ago, that she should try to express the spirit that had given birth to her own.

And as Jim sat silent and attentive he realized that while he had been troubled about her future and had been stumbling over platitudes concerning life to her, Catherine had herself found a way out—a way that no one else could ever have found for her.

"You have made your own pathway to freedom," he said, when she had ceased to speak. "Those about you, while they can control your actions and even harass your mind, can never really enslave it. You will, when you have mastered the art of expression, always be able to find a refuge inside yourself. You will have power to call up at will the friends of your imagination and to let them lead you where they wish."

He paused for a while, then he laid his hand gently on Catherine's sleeve. "Never lose sight of what you have just been telling me," he said. "Never forget that it is he who inspires you and that his spirit, bound as it is to yours, waits for deliverance. Nothing that you experience in life, however irksome it may appear, can ever separate you from him. Think always that the spirit of your father is within you, and that none can drive it away; for, always, you are of Robert Arlsea."

Catherine turned her eyes on his face. They were full of tears; but behind the tears shone the light of conviction.

"Thank you, Jim," was all she said; but she pushed her hand into his in a curious trusting way, much as a dog will push its nose into the hand of a friendly passer by. Jim closed his own upon it firmly, and for a while they remained so.

Then a sound beside them caused them to look round and they found Norman and Lily standing behind them—Norman quizzical, Lily malicious.

Jim stood up. "Did the peacocks display their tails for you?" he enquired.

"Yes, Mr. Conway," answered Lily pertly; "and we thought we heard two doves cooing too—but we may have been mistaken!"

"You probably were. They are shy birds, you know. I suppose one of them ate those strawberries of yours? I see they are gone from your hat."

"O no," said Lily, unruffled. "Mr. Swaine

ate those. He said he preferred them to gooseberries ! ”

“ Lily,” said Catherine, who had turned rather red, “ we must go now ; it is time for me to be home.”

Swaine looked at his watch and uttered an exclamation. “ I had no idea it was so late,” he said ; “ I’m afraid I must simply bolt. I shall only just get to the theatre in time. If you’ll excuse me, Miss Arlsea, I’ll take a taxi straight from the nearest gate.” He shook hands all round, and in a moment he was leaving the Gardens.

The other three walked together down the Flower Walk as far as the top of Queen’s Gate, where Jim Conway left the two girls, who went on alone.

“ Well, Lily,” asked Catherine, “ how did you get on with Mr. Swaine ? ”

Lily regarded her with an expression of sly amusement.

“ Pretty well, thanks,” she said. “ He’s not difficult to know ! ”

“ I thought him very handsome,” said Catherine. “ I should like to see him act.”

“ He makes love quite prettily,” said Miss Kellaway.

“ Have you seen him then ? ”

“ Yes, but not on the stage.”

Catherine looked surprised.

Lily burst out laughing. “ Don’t look so astonished, Kitty,” she said. “ It seems Jim Conway

can do a little in the same line. And you appear to be quite capable of meeting his advances half way ! ”

Catherine flushed hotly. “ You don’t understand, Lily.”

“ Don’t I ? ” said Lily “ I’m not so sure ! ”

CHAPTER VIII

THE SONG

ON the arrival of Norman Swaine one Sunday evening, Mrs. Conway sent her husband into the dining-room with Mr. Kellaway to smoke, as the drawing-room was somewhat crowded. When the introductions were over, Norman took his seat beside Catherine Arlsea, opposite Lily and Jim, who were carrying on a laughing conversation, while Mrs. Conway expatiated upon a new acquaintance to Mrs. Arlsea, who was seated beside her on the sofa.

"He is a Mr. Carr," she was explaining. "A middle-aged man and, I believe, very rich. I asked him to come this evening, but he is out of Town."

Mrs. Arlsea smoothed her fashionable skirt of broad black-and-white striped silk, touched her long jet earrings to make sure of their being in position, and enquired Mr. Carr's profession.

Mrs. Conway vouchsafed the information that he was a merchant.

"Coal!" interjected Jim.

Lily Kellaway cast a malicious glance at the two on the sofa, and Mrs. Arlsea, after an indignant

look at Jim, dropped her eyes and played with the handle of her lorgnettes.

"Coal is very profitable, is it not, Mr. Conway?" asked Lily innocently.

"Yes, Miss Lily; it doesn't last, you see, so you have to keep on buying more."

"I see," said Lily reflectively; "profitable but grubby!"

"I said Mr. Carr was a coal merchant, Lily, not a coal-heaver." Mrs. Conway's tone was sharp.

"Oh," said Lily, disgusted. "Then I suppose he's just like other people, after all?"

"Cheer up, Miss Lily; he has two motors, even if he is disappointingly clean!"

"What sort of motors?" drawled Lily. "Lorries?"

"I think it would be better if you did not talk quite so much nonsense, Lily," said Mrs. Conway emphatically.

"Which is best, Mr. Swaine?" asked Lily; "to talk nonsense or not to talk at all?"

Norman cast a glance at Catherine's white-clad figure, seated silent beside him.

"I suggest a happy medium, Miss Kellaway."

Mrs. Arlsea made the mental reflection that he was finding Catherine a bore.

"I think everyone should be able to make small talk, don't you, Mr. Swaine?" she asked with a disapproving glance at her daughter. "We should be able to talk upon any subject."

Norman turned and looked at Catherine without

knowing why he did so. He caught her in the act of glancing aside from her mother, and saw in her eyes something that interested him so much that he rose abruptly from his chair and, crossing to Mrs. Arlsea's side, entered into conversation with her, thus placing himself in a better position for observing Catherine.

He noted that, at the action, a slow flush spread itself over her face and that she stretched out her hand and, laying it on the arm of the chair he had vacated, pulled nervously at a tassel hanging therefrom.

Mrs. Arlsea preened herself on the reflection that, given a certain amount of attraction, a woman of riper years had always an advantage over a young girl.

"Don't you think that girls are sadly deficient in conversational powers nowadays?" she continued.

Jim Conway, on whom Norman's move and its resultant effect upon Catherine had not been lost, struck in.

"I can't say I have noticed that, Mrs. Arlsea. Here is Miss Kellaway, for instance, who is both able and willing to give us a demonstration to the contrary at any moment!"

Mrs. Arlsea ignored the interruption.

"What do you think constitutes 'charm' in a woman, Mr. Swaine?" she enquired.

"It's a big question, Mrs. Arlsea. I sometimes wonder if all attraction is merely a question of opposites."

"We now see why I am such a slave to your charms, Miss Lily," said Jim.

Norman gave Lily a mock languishing glance. "I gave myself the reason for my thralldom that I am dark and Miss Lily is—er—golden-brown!" he said.

"You are speaking of physical attraction, Mr. Swaine," Mrs. Conway remarked. "How about temperament?"

"The same applies, of course."

"Then I don't think you had better decide on Miss Kellaway, Swaine—you are too much alike!"

"Dear me, Mr. Conway: is that a compliment to Mr. Swaine or to myself?"

"Don't mind him, Miss Lily, he's jealous!" laughed Swaine.

Mrs. Arlsea tapped her foot impatiently. "Your theory, Mr. Swaine, would account for the fact that one so seldom meets a really nice man with a likeable wife."

Norman's eyes were on Catherine, and again he caught the flash of emotion that passed over her face.

"A man of any character should be able to develop his wife's personality," he said.

"It is not moulding that most women need," said Jim, "but liberty for self-development."

Norman thought this a poor judgment of women; until he caught a glance of gratitude flung Jim by Catherine and remembered that he had said she was over-strictly handled.

"I shouldn't mind catching just a glimpse of

the whip-handle sticking out of my husband's pocket," Lily admitted.

" Provided always that it was properly wrapped up in silver paper ! " laughed Norman.

" It would need a firm hand to keep you in order, Lily," said Mrs. Arlsea tartly.

" It would, Mrs. Arlsea ; firmer than any I know of at present."

In Catherine's smile Norman discovered, not the timidity he had feared, but a touch of satisfaction at the thrust.

" You haven't thrown much light on the question, Swaine," Jim remarked. " I am still wondering where I get my charm ! "

" I give it up, old man ; perhaps Miss Lily will tell us."

" O, Mr. Swaine, consider my modesty ! "

" Your what, Lily ? " enquired Mrs. Arlsea with sarcasm.

Mrs. Conway thought it time to intervene. " We at any rate know of one of Mr. Swaine's charms," she said, smiling. " Will you sing for us ? "

Norman rose at once and crossed to the piano, near which Catherine was seated. Running his hands over the keys, he asked, " What shall I sing, Mrs. Conway ? "

" That song you sang for us when last you were here—something about ' life.' "

Norman played the prelude and suddenly started to sing.

Jim leaned back in his chair, his eyes on Cather-

ine. He was troubled. It seemed to him that Fate was taking the reins and he wondered where she would drive this silent white-clad girl.

Norman's powerful voice gave out the first verse of the song, and Jim, as he watched the girl's face, saw her eyes kindle and her hands clasp themselves in her lap. She turned her head towards the singer and fixed her eyes upon his profile. Jim knew that Norman was intensely sensitive to the interest he excited in women and would be quick to notice the action. He endeavoured by a movement to attract Catherine's attention, but without success.

Norman began the second verse of the song, singing it with all the passion of which he was capable, and Catherine's clasped hands unconsciously raised themselves against her breast.

"Now that I have you and hold you," sang Norman with intense conviction, "Life has no more to give." Catherine's face was paling and her lips parted as he worked up to the climax.

"It is summer—it is summer; come, let us live!" The rushing chords on the piano ceased and in the murmur of thanks he turned his head ever so slightly and let his eyes rest on hers. There was no doubt in his mind of what he saw there.

All her timidity had fled, and she met his black eyes with complete response in her own and an unveiling of depths that, expectant as he was, surprised him. He looked straight into them, meeting Catherine's spirit with his own. "This I can do," he seemed to say, "for in me is power

to bear you away from petty fears and scruples, will you or no."

The moment passed. He turned easily to Mrs. Arlsea, asking her opinion of the song, and Catherine's eyes fell again, and once more she stretched out her hand and played with the tassel of the chair. Mrs. Conway asked Norman to sing again. He assented and turned back to the piano. Playing some soft chords, he asked himself with what he should follow up such a climax, and on a thought of contrast began to sing:

I be hopin' you remember,
Now the spring has come again,
How we used to gather violets
By the little church at Eastnor,
For we were so happy then.

O my love, do you remember
Kisses that you took and gave?
There be violets now in plenty
By the little church at Eastnor;
But they're growing on your grave.

This time Catherine did not raise her head, and as he sang the last words he glanced towards her, to see that her lips were quivering almost uncontrollably.

He touched the final notes softly into silence; then, rising, he took the chair he had originally occupied by her side.

Jim Conway had taken in the whole manoeuvre, and now began at once to address Mrs. Arlsea with the idea of diverting her attention from her

daughter's emotion, and Norman, bending forward to reply to a remark from Mrs. Conway, managed at its close to say to Catherine, in a voice that was almost a whisper :

" You are troubled. Forgive me."

Catherine made no sign beyond a look, but in that lifting of her eyes he saw, behind the tears they held, a light leap up.

He did not speak again to her. Mrs. Arlsea started to question him on the value to its possessor of a singing voice on the stage, and it was in replying to her questions that it occurred to him how interesting it would be to act to Catherine. He mentally reviewed his present part in his mind, and, as an outcome of his cogitations, offered the stage box for the use of the entire party when a convenient evening could be arranged for its procuring.

Hugh Martin was still up when Norman returned to the flat that night. He was engaged in writing a play, and it was his habit to sit up late over his work. Norman found him surrounded by a vast litter of books and papers and with an ash-tray before him heaped up with ashes and burnt out cigarette ends.

Martin looked up as Swaine switched on an extra light. " Hallo ! " he said ; " has it been an interesting evening ? "

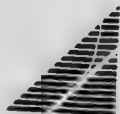
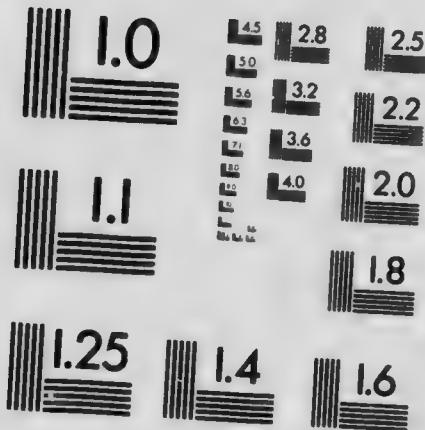
Swaine made a brief reply, and pulling off his coat, went into another room for a smoking jacket.

The room as revealed by the augmented light was



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very characteristic, and reflected the personality of each of its occupants individually. The walls were of a greenish tint, with one or two pictures of Eastern type and colour. There were very long curtains reaching almost from ceiling to floor, striped in blue, green and purple. A peacock-blue carpet figured with black covered the centre of the floor, and a low flat divan occupied one side of the room, on which were piled cushions of peacock-blue banded about with vivid emerald and black. The same material draped the piano which was set at right angles to the greenish wall. The heavy oak table at which Martin sat was littered all over with his papers and books and a typewriter stood upon it, while the wall behind him was lined with bookshelves, on top of which stood queer Chinese monsters holding in their mouths peacock's feathers.

Martin was older than Swaine—about thirty-five, one would guess—and had the face and manner of a student. He was not striking in appearance, but his quiet face and deep blue eyes gave the impression of a man to be trusted.

Norman, re-entering, stretched himself at ease on the divan, and lighting a cigarette, reached out for a copper ash-tray in the form of a curled snake with reared head and shining green eyes.

He blew a puff of smoke ceilingwards and remarked upon the heat, adding that he thought there must be thunder in the air.

Martin nodded, eyeing him abstractedly, his mind only partially detached from the intricacies

of plot. He returned to a contemplation of his papers for a few moments, then suddenly looking up, he said :

"Miss Farrell rang you up this afternoon, Swaine. She wants to know if you'll go down to Richmond to-morrow night with her, after the performance."

Norman grimaced. "Carr's out of Town," he said; "I happened to hear that at the Conways' this evening. I suppose Miss Daisy finds half a loaf better than no bread."

Martin shrugged his shoulders. "I merely replied to her that I would give you the message," he said. "She wants you to ring her up in the morning."

Swaine laughed unpleasantly. "I don't think she'll find me very complacent as a second fiddle," he remarked drily. "I shall point out to her that her charms are seen to greater advantage in Carr's Rolls Royce."

Martin looked curiously at Swaine. He guessed that the latter's words were the outcome of some personal change of attitude, and his surmise was confirmed when Swaine asked :

"Do you think you could get your sister to come out to tea one day, Martin? I want to ask a couple of girls whom I met at the Conways'."

Martin acquiesced and began putting away his papers. Swaine finished his cigarette in silence, and rising, strolled over to the piano and, despite the lateness of the hour, began to practise a new song.

CHAPTER IX

A CHINA ASH-TRAY

WHEN Norman Swaine called at Gloucester Road in response to an invitation from Mrs. Arlsea, he found that lady alone. He dismissed a hope that he should be able to pursue his acquaintance with Catherine and proceeded to make himself agreeable to her mother.

Mrs. Arlsea handed him a cup of tea, and seating herself upon a settee, disposed her amethyst silk skirts about her with delicate touches of her fingers.

She asked Norman whether he had caught the last train westwards on the occasion of the evening when they had met at the Conways', and remarked that she thought it was very self-denying of him to give up his one free evening to visiting.

Swaine reflected that, given the necessity of half-mourning, Mrs. Arlsea made a wise choice in her colour, and replied that Jim Conway was an old friend.

"I suppose you knew him before he went to Australia?"

"I knew him in Australia, Mrs. Arlsea. I was out there on tour some four or five years ago,

and ran across Conway at a mining town in Queensland."

Mrs. Arlsea threw him a reflective glance. "He was trying to make his fortune, wasn't he? Do you think he succeeded?"

"I think he made a certain sum. Fellows out there regarded him as one of the more lucky adventurers. But I have no knowledge beyond what I gleaned from gossip. Conway is always reticent about his affairs."

"A sure sign that there is little or nothing to conceal."

Mrs. Arlsea spoke curtly, and Swaine, perceiving antagonism, continued more freely.

"Either nothing or much," he said. "I confess I'm curious to know why he is so determined about returning to the Colonies; but I have never been able to get anything out of him on the subject."

"Mrs. Conway was speaking of it the other day," Mrs. Arlsea said, "and regretting her son's obstinate stand in the matter."

Norman drank his tea and set down the cup. "It's a wild life," he remarked. "I don't think a man who had lived it would ever settle down to home-life in England."

Mrs. Arlsea took the empty cup. "He might marry," she said.

Norman shot a glance at her and replied, "Out there!"

"Why 'out there,' Mr. Swaine? Please smoke, if you care to."

Swaine thanked her, and taking out a cigarette, tapped it thoughtfully on his green-leather case. "There was a girl in a store on the ranch whose name used to be coupled with his."

Mrs. Arlsea's eyebrows went up. "A store?" she said.

"Social distinctions are not so rigidly drawn in the Colonies, Mrs. Arlsea."

Swaine lighted the cigarette and returned the case to his pocket. "It would account for his determination to leave England," he remarked carelessly.

Mrs. Arlsea ran her slim fingers up and down the long jet chain she wore. In the face of Jim's former conversation she could hardly take Swaine's gossip very seriously; but it appeared to her to be a piece of information to convey to Catherine against a possible contingency.

"Does he contemplate marriage?" she enquired.

Norman raised a quizzical eyebrow. "Marriage is hardly a fashionable institution on the ranch, Mrs. Arlsea."

Mrs. Arlsea lifted the tassel at the end of her chain and contemplated it thoughtfully. "Do you know this Mr. Carr?" she asked.

With a humorous perception of her train of thought, Norman replied that he did. "That is to say, we frequently meet at the stage door," he added drily.

"He sounds interesting."

"Yes. He is also attractively wealthy, as becomes the habitué of the 'back.'"

"I fear you are cynical, Mr. Swaine!"

"It is a trait that is difficult to avoid in my profession. We see so much from behind the scenes."

"Particularly with regard to women, I suppose."

"Well, yes, they certainly stand the test worse than the men folk. Perhaps it is because one looks for so much more from women."

"Yet actresses are very attractive to men."

Norman smiled. "Those men who find them so are not usually actors," he remarked with meaning.

Mrs. Arlsea gave a touch to her amethyst skirts. "I think you actors miss a great deal in your home-life," she said sentimentally.

"That is what Martin's sister tells me," replied Swaine. "But I always say that we can the better appreciate genuine charm when we do see it." He lowered his voice a little and leaned forward, meeting Mrs. Arlsea's smiling gaze boldly.

"What is Mr. Martin's sister like?"

"She is dark and to me unattractive," replied Swaine. "Her name is Wilton. She is a widow."

"Young?"

Swaine made a mental calculation as to his questioner's age and replied, "I should say about thirty-eight. The most interesting age for a woman, Mrs. Arlsea."

Mrs. Arlsea smiled graciously. "For a married woman, perhaps. It is surely old for a girl."

"It was not a girl of whom I was thinking," he replied meaningly. "Most men who have

learned from experience find the more subtle attraction in a woman of riper age."

"Who has also learned from experience!"

Swaine laughed. "Well, yes, I admit the force of the impeachment!"

Mrs. Arlsea reflected that, whatever its drawbacks might be, the life of the stage certainly gave a man social ease. She rose and gracefully crossed the room to fetch an ash-tray, which she handed to Swaine, who had also risen and was appraising the swinging amethyst of her skirts.

He took the little piece of china she handed to him lingeringly and gave her a long look of admiration.

And at this moment the door opened and Catherine walked in.

Mrs. Arlsea turned sharply as she heard Catherine enter and hastily took her hand from the china tray.

"How you creep about, Catherine," she said pettishly, "and why do you stand there staring? Can't you greet Mr. Swaine?"

Over Catherine's wondering face a slow flush spread itself. She came forward at once and gave Swaine her hand, but without meeting his eyes.

Swaine had taken his lip between his teeth and mentally cursed Mrs. Arlsea and his own clumsiness.

Catherine approached the tea-tray. "I should like some tea, Mother," she said quietly; "I have been reading upstairs and had forgotten the time."

Mrs. Arlsea returned to her seat on the settee,

and Catherine helped herself to tea and, cup in hand, seated herself opposite Swaine, who had remained standing.

She was surprised at her own calmness. Usually she was intensely nervous and self-conscious when visitors were present, but for some reason that she could not account for she felt all at once mistress of the situation.

Swaine sat down again, stuck out his feet in turn, and pulled at the knees of his trousers. He was conscious of a distinct sensation of pique. That he, a man of the world in the most subtle meaning of the phrase, should be put out of countenance by a unformed girl with no conversational powers incensed him, while it whetted his curiosity.

"Are you a student, Miss Catherine?" he enquired.

Catherine raised her deep grey eyes and let them rest quietly on his face. "Yes," she said.

Mrs. Arlsea moved impatiently. "Not of social demeanour, Mr. Swaine, I am afraid," she said bitingly.

Swaine caught the gleam in the girl's eyes as she turned them on her mother.

"Mr. Swaine will not need to be told that, Mother," she said. "It is self-evident."

Norman's surprise increased. Here was a further instance of the subtle defiance that had interested him so much the other evening at the Conways'. He glanced at Mrs. Arlsea. She was regarding Catherine's profile with cold contempt,

He realized that he must exert himself if he did not wish his individuality to be lost in the clash of personalities.

He started to talk of the theatre, making an engagement for their occupation of the stage box on a certain evening. Mrs. Arlsea and he discussed the plan and she nominated the party, Swaine stipulating only that Martin and his sister should be of it.

"Martin is not acting at present," he explained, "and is utilizing his leisure to finish a play that he is writing."

Perceiving that he had aroused Catherine's interest, he gave a brief account of Martin's work, in which he humorously described him as trotting round with his memorandum book and pencil like the White King. Catherine met his eyes with a sudden gleam of laughing appreciation.

"I can see him!" she said.

Swaine had a sense of confidence restored, and wishing to retire on a satisfactory note, he presently rose and took leave of Mrs. Arlsea, who then moved towards the bell.

With a memory of the scene she had interrupted, Catherine attempted to leave the room, but Norman forestalled her, and murmuring some commonplace, he opened the door for her and followed her out into the dusky hall.

The maid's step could be heard advancing from the back premises in response to Mrs. Arlsea's ring. Swaine seized the moment without a second's hesitation.

He caught Catherine's hand. "It is to be your theatre party," he whispered. "It is for you alone that I will act that night."

Catherine did not attempt to move or draw away her hand. She stood quite still, facing him, and in her dark eyes fixed on his he read a consciousness of his power, and beneath it something of an appeal.

He passed out of the hall door feeling more intrigued than ever.

Catherine went upstairs, and going straight to her bedroom window, she drew aside the curtain and followed Swaine's military figure with her eyes. It was characteristic of her that she made no effort to conceal the movement. Had Swaine turned his head he would have seen her standing there in the full rays of the evening sunlight. But he did not look back, and when he had passed out of sight she dropped the curtain and took up her book. After a moment or two, however, she gave up the attempt at reading: Norman Swaine's face with its dark colouring and the eager gleam in the black eyes hovered before her and blotted out the printed page.

She lifted the hand he had seized as they stood together in the hall and looked at it, touching it wonderingly, as though she no longer recognized it as her own. Then she rose, laid aside her book, and, going to the dressing-table, looked at the reflection presented by the mirror.

She asked herself if the grave, softly coloured

face she saw reflected there would be likely to attract such a man as Swaine.

Would he not rather prefer a girl of Lily Kellaway's type?

But it was obvious that Lily did not particularly interest him.

He treated her with a kind of amused familiarity that Catherine instinctively knew covered only indifference. She wandered over to the window again and stood looking out. She wanted to leave the house; to go alone through the streets; to wander in the Gardens under the chestnuts.

Suddenly a series of sharp sounds fell upon her ear, making her start nervously and then shrink away. Someone was tapping on a window pane. The bars of a cage seemed to rear themselves about her; she saw again the scene she had interrupted earlier in the afternoon—Norman Swaine's dark head bending towards her mother's fair one, the bit of fragile china held between them. Then the bars fell away, leaving her standing in the sun-filled garden at Mortham, where the scent of flowering currants hung on the evening air.

The sun was setting. Her father would be coming home; she could talk to him about it all and ask him——

The rapping on the pane commenced again. Shivering, she awoke from her day-dream. With a sick sense of reality she leaned back against the casement, raising her pain-filled eyes to the paling blue of the evening sky.

CHAPTER X

THE BROKEN TEA-SET

CLARE WILTON greeted her brother affectionately and looked round the drawing-room with an audible sniff.

"What on earth have you been burning, Hugh?" she asked. "It smells like an Earl's Court Exhibition in here."

Martin glanced towards the mantelpiece, where a thin spiral of grey-blue smoke ascended from the jaws of a green-china lizard. "Joss," he said laconically.

Clare regarded him curiously. "I didn't know you went in for the 'heathen idol's foot' touch," she said.

"I don't. Swaine lighted the stuff before he went out."

"Where is he, and why doesn't he stay at home and receive his guests?"

"He's gone to Ealing Common station to meet the two girls."

Mrs. Wilton seated herself on a high-backed chair and began pulling off her grey *suede* gloves. She was a long-limbed, slender woman, fastidious in dress and unconventional in manner, and her

apparent frank directness covered much speculative shrewdness.

She was wearing a grey muslin frock fastened at the neck with a single amethyst of great size, and a scarf of dull purple *crêpe de Chine* fell over her shoulders. She drew the long gloves through her hands, pulling out a purple enamel cigarette-case and lighting a cigarette. "Must counteract this incense effort," she said. "Who are the girls?"

Hugh gave an account of them. "But I have not seen them," he added. "Swaine wangled Mrs. Conway into getting them here."

Mrs. Wilton leaned back in her chair and blew a puff of smoke ceilingwards. "How is the play going, Hugh?"

"Better, now that I am in the third act. I ought to finish it by the autumn."

"I'll ask Barnsfort to dinner one night, if you'll come; you might like to discuss it with him."

"Thanks, I should. Here comes Swaine."

There was a sound of steps in the hall and Swaine entered.

He shook hands with Mrs. Wilton and introduced the two girls.

She ran her eye over them with a penetrating glance that discerned more than the externals of Lily Kellaway's inexpensive green muslin and the accordion pleating of Catherine's white silk might have expressed to the ordinary observer. Lily she dismissed at once with a nod and smile; the ruddy damsel was obviously in no need of

female protection. But the eyes that looked out at her from under the pink roses on Catherine's wide-brimmed Leghorn made a shy yet dignified appeal.

"My brother was speaking of you, Miss Arlsea," she said; "won't you sit beside me?"

"Thank you," answered Catherine, and at the sound of her voice Hugh Martin paused in the act of offering Lily a cigarette, and, turning his eyes upon her, remained with his case extended until recalled to himself by Lily's remarking pertly, "I've got that, thank you, Mr. Martin!" He regarded her imperturbably as he returned the cigarette-case to his pocket and lighted a match, and Lily decided that he was dull and that she was going to dislike him.

Norman Swaine rose from where he was bending over a copper kettle and spirit lamp on the blue-tiled hearth, and straightening his tall figure crossed to the divan and seated himself on the far side of Mrs. Wilton, who had begun to talk to Catherine about theatres. He remarked that he did not think their present venture, "The Ivory Fan," would run much longer. "London's seen it," he said. "I don't believe it will carry us into the autumn. Have you been to it, Mrs. Wilton?"

"Yes, I have seen it twice. I went for the second time last week with some country friends."

Swaine bent forward to Catherine. He had dropped all his assurance of manner and spoke quietly and with just a shade of deference in his

tone. "You must tell me what you think of it after you have seen it, Miss Arlsea," he said.

Catherine met his eyes with aroused interest. "Will you please tell me what the name means?" she asked.

Again Martin detached himself from the perfunctory conversation he was carrying on with Lily Kellaway to listen.

Norman was pleased. "'The Ivory Fan' is typical of the screen of conventionality," he replied, "by means of which the woman who wields it conceals her real motives from the world."

"What are these motives?"

"In this case, the acquirement of luxury. The woman, Muriel Rane, uses her husband, whom she loves, as a screen for her lover, who is wealthy."

"How does it end, Mr. Swaine?"

"In a 'triangular' scene, when the husband, who suspects that his wife is faithless, finds the two together and accuses them. The lover admits his love for Muriel and asks her there, before her husband, to go away with him, whereupon the woman drops the fan and speaks the truth."

"And leaves her husband?"

"No. The play ends happily in reconciliation."

Catherine turned her head and looked dreamily out of the window. "That is an artistic mistake," she said suddenly.

Clare Wilton regarded her with surprise and then glanced at her brother.

Martin was listening curiously. "Why do you say that, Miss Arlsea?" he asked.

Catherine blushed a little, but meeting his frank look of interest, she spoke directly to him.

"A happy ending sits badly on the character described as Muriel's," she said.

"Tell us how you would have it end, Miss Arlsea?"

"Yes, tell us," added Swaine.

Catherine's laugh was rather embarrassed. "I cannot write plays, so how could I tell you?" she said. "The woman drops the fan so suddenly—yet she has carried it always. The audience has never really seen her face. It is like introducing them to a fresh character at the last moment of the play."

Martin broke the silence. "If you have not tried to write, Miss Arlsea," he said quietly, "I think you ought to begin."

Catherine, recalled to herself, coloured again, but she replied to his words frankly.

"I have no knowledge on which to work."

"Stage-craft is easily learned."

"I did not mean knowledge of the stage. I meant knowledge of life," said Catherine.

Martin was still regarding her very seriously. "Knowledge such as you refer to comes strangely," he said, "rather from within, I think, than from actual conscious experience."

Catherine looked at him eagerly. "Do you think that?" she asked.

"Yes; the memory stores so much that we have observed only unconsciously."

Norman, who had not taken his eyes off Catherine,

wondered why these words of Martin's brought a shade of disappointment into her face. He felt, too, a little piqued that Martin and not himself should have induced her to talk.

Clare Wilton, looking from one to the other, wondered afresh at the interest Swaine took in this dreamy-faced girl, and was conscious of a sensation of apprehension which somehow included her brother.

Lily, who was showing every sign of boredom, here informed Swaine that the kettle was boiling over. Norman rose, and between them they made tea and carried on a mild flirtation over the cups, while Clare talked to Catherine and Martin sat thoughtfully regarding them.

When tea was over, Lily proposed that they should help to clear away, and Catherine and she removed the tea-things, while Norman directed the proceedings and led the way to the small kitchen.

"You must bring the cakes to the dining-room, Miss Arlsea," he said, stopping half-way down the hall.

As Lily carried the tray, she was obliged to go on into the kitchen in order to set it down. Norman went into the dining-room with Catherine, where he stooped and opened a cupboard for her to place the cake within it. She did as he directed, and as she raised herself again she found that Swaine had pushed the door closed behind them and was beside her.

He seized her hands and bent his head under

the wide brim of her hat, bringing his ardent black eyes on a level with hers.

Catherine did not attempt to move away from him.

Rather she seemed to be drawn towards him, seeking in the depths of his gaze something that she wished yet feared to find.

"I want to teach you to love, Catherine," Norman said in low fierce tones.

Catherine's gaze did not falter. "I must first learn to live," she answered.

"Love and life are one."

She shivered a little. "But I have yet to be born," she said.

"The will must come first. Do you will it, Catherine?"

Her lips quivered and the colour left her face. "God knows—yes," she answered with repressed emotion.

He took her two hands in one of his and put his other arm about her.

"The power is mine to give you your desire."

Catherine's eyes remained fixed on his. "Yes," she whispered; "I know it."

His face was almost touching hers, but before their lips could meet an appalling crash resounded from the neighbourhood of the kitchen.

Norman rapped out an oath and hastily left the room.

Lily was standing just inside the kitchen door, the copper tea-tray swinging from one hand and fragments of green and blue china littered around

her feet. She was very red and had a queer glint in her eyes.

"I'm afraid I've broken them, Mr. Swaine," swinging the tray in the direction of the spilt china.

Mrs. Wilton appeared in the passage as Norman stooped and picked up the copper kettle, which had rolled to the door. "I'm afraid you have!" he said drily.

"I'm no good at handling china, Mr. Swaine," Lily pursued. "It's never safe to leave me quite alone with it."

The emphasis on the last words was unmistakable. Clare Wilton shot a glance at Swaine and turned away in search of Catherine, whom she found in the drawing-room talking to Martin.

Norman moved a step nearer Lily. "You vixen!" he hissed through his shut teeth.

Lily met his eyes defiantly, with a malicious smile at the corners of her mouth.

"Do you think I went there to play Rosalind to your Juliet?" asked Lily angrily as she and Catherine were seated in the train on their way home.

Catherine regarded her calmly. "I think it's been an expensive tea party for Mr. Swaine," she said.

"Yes, and it will be an expensive one for you, my girl, before you've ended."

Catherine smiled. "You can have nothing for nothing," she remarked.

"Just so. And the tea-set is the price Norman Swaine must pay for his carelessness in neglecting to shut the dining-room door behind him when he goes courting."

"I suppose it is useless to speak to you of honourable behaviour, Lily?"

"Quite. There's so much honourable behaviour about that it becomes a drug in the market."

"In that case I need not expect any from you in the future."

"I'm certainly fed up with the gooseberry job, if that's what you mean."

Catherine raised her brows. "Why not give it up then?" she asked.

"Right you are," Lily answered, tossing her head. "Here we are at West Kensington. I'll get out and leave you to go home by yourself."

If Lily expected Catherine to make any effort to detain her, she was disappointed. Catherine simply said good-bye quietly as Lily left the train.

She realized that the hour for which she had been bracing herself these last few weeks was upon her. She had felt very definitely that there must come a break in her present mode of life. She must make an effort to get her mother to see reason, and if that proved impossible she must make a determined stand for freedom.

The power that lay in Norman Swaine was now at the back of what she was going to do and would make it easier.

CHAPTER XI

CATHERINE LOCKS THE DOOR

"WHERE is Lily?" was Mrs. Arlsea's first enquiry as Catherine entered the drawing-room.

Catherine replied that Lily had left her at West Kensington and gone home alone.

Mrs. Arlsea regarded her daughter narrowly, for there was something in Catherine's manner that argued a change of attitude, and her will at once rose to meet it. She told her to go and take her hat off, and on her return to the drawing-room proceeded to enquire Lily's reason for going home.

Catherine went up to a small table, and taking up a book of verse that lay there, held it tightly in her hands. She replied that Lily had been cross about something, and, to Mrs. Arlsea's question as to what that something was, merely answered that she would rather not say.

A gleam of anger showed itself in Mrs. Arlsea's eyes. She asked Catherine whether this was the first time Lily had left her when they had been out together, how often it had occurred and on what occasion, to all of which questions Catherine continued to give monosyllabic replies, admitting quietly that Lily had once before left her at her

own request and this in spite of her mother's wish to the contrary.

Mrs. Arlsea folded her lorgnettes with a snap. "I will speak to Lily about all this," she said.

Catherine seated herself in a chair near by, still with the book of verse in her hands. "You need not speak to Lily, Mother," she said quietly.

Mrs. Arlsea, who had risen from her chair, sat down again.

"What do you mean by that, Catherine?"

"I mean that I am now old enough to go out alone."

"Indeed! There may possibly be two opinions about that."

"There may certainly be two opinions, but I think they cannot both be founded upon reason. It seems to me to be unreasonable that I should continue to be treated as a child."

"You are as yet a mere child."

"No, Mother; I am eighteen, and am old for my age."

Mrs. Arlsea tapped her foot upon the carpet. "I have told you before," said she, "that I do not care to see young girls going about town by themselves. Girls were never allowed to do so when I was young."

"I know that, Mother; but I think if you reflect you will see that times have altered. One continually sees girls of our own class walking alone."

"I object to the practice, Catherine, and let me tell you that I object equally to your tone in the matter."

" I am sorry if it offends you, Mother. I feel I must make an effort to get you to see reason. If I am ever to grow up at all, I must, I think, be given a certain amount of liberty for self-development : otherwise I do not see how I am to make my way through the world."

" I am here to look after you."

Catherine looked up and ceased to turn the book about in her hands. " That is just it, Mother," she said. " It does not seem to me that I require all this looking after."

A tinge of colour had come into Mrs. Arlsea's cheek, and she asked sharply, " Who has been putting these ideas into your head ? "

" No one at all," Catherine replied. " It is surely not surprising that I should grow tired of being treated like a child."

" Since when have you made the discovery that you are so wonderfully grown up ? "

A gleam of resentment showed itself in Catherine's eyes. She lowered her gaze and spoke with an evident effort at self-control.

" I am not at all grown up ; it is just what I complain of. At my present rate of progress I never shall be so."

" So much the more desirable. The longer a girl keeps her youth, the better for herself."

" It is surely not better that anyone should be stupid, Mother. I cannot continue to remain a child, even at your bidding. I must mix with the world to some extent. As it is, you often complain of my lack of social confidence : how am I to

acquire anything of the sort if I am given no opportunity for development ? ”

“ You can observe me. If you learn to behave as I do in society you will do very well.”

At these words a vivid recollection of the scene she had interrupted between her mother and Norman Swaine in that very room lately sprang into Catherine's mind, and she was shaken with nervous laughter.

Mrs. Arlsea's flush deepened. “ May I ask, Catherine, what you find to laugh at ? ” she enquired angrily.

Catherine grew grave again, “ Little enough, certainly,” she answered. “ My own position seems no laughing matter to me.”

“ I really don't know what you are talking about. What position ? ”

“ My present fettered life.”

“ These are the sort of phrases you get out of books. They do not apply to reality. All this comes of the way you are perpetually poring over a book. You will become bent in the shoulders.”

“ I shall do better bent in the shoulders than bent in mind. Will you not listen to reason, Mother ? ”

“ If the nonsense you have been talking for the past quarter of an hour is what you call reason, I will most certainly not. It is very forbearing on my part to have been patient so long.”

“ Well, then, it seems to me if I can do nothing to persuade you I must take the law into my own hands.”

Mrs. Arlsea stared.

"I must have more freedom, Mother," Catherine continued desperately. "I cannot lead my present life always. I must try to understand what life means. And if I have not your permission to learn this—well, I must set about it without your permission. That is all."

Mrs. Arlsea's lips had drawn themselves into a thin line; the colour had receded from her face and there was a glint in her blue eyes. She sat quite still and regarded Catherine fixedly, deliberately seeking a weapon.

"It's a good thing your father is dead," she said suddenly.

Catherine started violently. The words falling on her ears struck her strained nerves as terrible. Her lips parted, but no words came.

Mrs. Arlsea continued remorselessly: "He has been spared the pain of seeing what his daughter has grown into—an obstinate and ungrateful girl who has forgotten him and her early training and desires only her own selfish ends."

The stiff back of the book of poems Catherine held snapped across with a crack. The sound seemed to break a spell.

She rose to her feet, and even Mrs. Arlsea's determined gaze wavered before the fire in her eyes.

"You may forget those words," she gasped, "but I shall never do so."

She turned and left the room with the broken book still grasped in her hands.

Mrs. Arlsea heard her go upstairs and for the first time in her life lock the bedroom door behind her. And in that moment, blinded by egotism as she was, she realized that her dominion over her daughter's spirit was at an end.

Catherine sat down on the edge of the bed as though unable to remain standing. Her heart was beating violently; she felt a sick sensation as though she had received a blow.

This, then, was the end of all possibility of understanding between her mother and herself.

The words she had just heard were as the death-blow to all reasonable intercourse. There was nothing left but for her to take up a fresh attitude towards life for herself. She would never again place herself in the position of having such a blow struck at her. And for the rest, she determined passionately that the same roof should not shelter both her mother and herself one hour longer than was inevitable. She must seize the first opportunity offered her to leave the house for ever. Opportunity! Opportunities were made by people for themselves: they did not fall ready ripened, like plums from a tree! If only she had a friend from whom to seek advice. Catherine ran her eye mentally over her limited acquaintance. The women she dismissed at once. There was, she thought, no help to be found in such. They had not the power. Power! Catherine stood up suddenly, and the book of poems slid from her lap to the floor. He, Norman Swaine, had both the power and the will to help

her. "I want to teach you to love," he had said. "Love and life are one." He knew life, for he had lived it—he lived it daily. What if she appealed to him? Would he not teach her how to be free? Free of all the petty carping and petty restraints and petty observances. Free from the constant strain of needless supervision. Lily Kellaway's words came back to her mind, "It is better to be a slave to a man, which is natural, than to a woman, which is intolerable."

Lily was right. Whatever bondage lay in a life such as she might lead with a man like Swaine, it would be preferable to that which she now endured, for at least she would be in the world and gaining knowledge and self-development; whereas here——

She sat down on the bed again and set herself deliberately to think of Swaine as her short acquaintance had revealed him to her. He was a man of action and not a thinker, though he must have considerable talent, seeing that he was an actor of repute and a fairly good musician. A man, as she guessed, who seized and made the most of every opportunity offered him in life either in work or in play. The scene she had witnessed between her mother and Swaine sprang again into her mind; also the very obvious fact that he was willing to make love to Lily Kellaway at any moment simply for the amusement of the hour.

These traits, however, did not greatly disconcert Catherine. Indeed, the fact that Swaine was

eager to squeeze the orange dry of its juice rather added to his credit in her estimation. One would not look to such a man for faithfulness, she reflected, but for strength and daring. Swaine did not lack courage. She felt instinctively that he would dare much to gain his object.

And his object was life. The full enjoyment of his power to live. "It is summer; come, let us live!" She seemed to hear the powerful baritone, and the rushing chords of the song vibrated through her being.

She stooped to pick up the book of verse, and touched the broken back remorsefully with her fingers. It was a small volume of Lindsay Gordon's poems that Jim Conway had given her. Jim loved the verse for its pictures of Australian life, and Catherine felt the ruthlessness of having injured it. She rose and put the volume upon her bookshelf and fell to thinking of Jim. He had now fixed the date of his departure for Australia. His mother had told her so: he would sail in a month or six weeks from now. Nothing that Mrs. Conway could say had sufficed to deter him from carrying out this plan. Catherine felt that here was an added incentive to leave home: for with Jim's departure her one friend would have gone from London. The hope she had treasured that he might wish her to accompany him had almost faded. He had made no sign when she had spoken with him on the subject of his departure.

She thought she would question him at the first opportunity and find out if possible his reason

for going. Perhaps when she told him of her mother's final attitude he would take her away. If not—the thought ended in a reverie in which Norman Swaine's handsome face and the memory of the words he had spoken that afternoon played a prominent part.

CHAPTER XII

" THE IVORY FAN "

NORMAN SWAINE'S part in " The Ivory Fan " was that of the lover who, having been tricked into belief in a woman's affection, finds himself at the close of the play rejected in favour of the husband he has hitherto despised. It was generally considered to be a notable piece of acting ; that he had lifted the character of Allen Fairway from the conventional level of a traitor meeting with his deserts to that of a man who, however guilty, is yet genuine in his love for Muriel Rane, and who meets with dignity the discovery consequent upon the dropping of the fan, that the features revealed to him are not those of the woman he had believed her to be. And this in spite of the fact that in so finding he has lost not only the love of the woman but his ideal of her, the ideal which he now perceives to be of paramount importance.

This interpretation of Fairway's character had at the rehearsals of the play met with some opposition from its author, who pointed out that by lifting the character of the lover on to a higher level that of the husband became overshadowed and a

certain loss of balance was entailed. But Swaine had persisted in his course and had been justified by the results.

It is a remarkable fact that an actor so often possesses the power of making clear to his audience that which he himself appears very little to comprehend. In acting the character of Fairway all Swaine's selfish superficiality vanished. His behaviour became considerate, his love-making sincere. A certain restraint and dignity too, that in his ordinary behaviour was completely lacking, became a marked feature of Swaine's performance. "To you, Rane, I say nothing," is Fairway's final speech as he leaves the stage, "for I will offer no excuse. And for you, Muriel, it is better for me that you have dropped the fan, because it is better for all of us that we know the truth, even though it be at the expense of an ideal."

Standing well down stage, Fairway speaks these words, and receiving no reply, he walks slowly up to a door at the back and makes his exit without looking round. This for the audience was the final moment of the play. The short scene between husband and wife that followed was lacking in interest, and the general feeling amongst the female members of the audience was more or less summed up in the statement of an enthusiastic damsel to the effect that had she been Muriel she knew which of the two she would have preferred, a remark which was overheard by Catherine as she waited in the crowded porch of the theatre

while Jim Conway procured a taxi after the performance.

Martin had gone round to the back to speak to Swaine, so Jim manœuvred the three elder women and Lily Kellaway into a cab, and himself proposed to follow in another with Catherine, in order that he might speak with her alone.

For some weeks past he had been very anxious about her, fearing that what he had dreaded for her was coming about and that she would fall a victim to Swaine's unstable attractions.

He had paid scant attention to the play that evening, and his eyes had been more often on Catherine's face than on the stage, as she had leant forward in the box to follow movement of Swaine's tall figure as he moved about the scene. Martin's attempt to draw her into conversation between the acts had met the minimum reply consistent with politeness, and when, on the fall of the curtain, Jim had helped her into her cloak, she had given him no word of thanks and scarcely seemed conscious of his action.

Now, as he pushed his way to her through the crowd, he looked at her, standing a little to one side, and noted with almost painful clearness of vision the tall figure whose height was emphasized by the straight lines of the deep blue cloak. Her face was flushed, and a strand of brown hair fell from under the fillet of silver wheat-ears bound about her head.

She was gazing deep-eyed into vacancy, and did not notice Jim's approach until he touched her

arm, and together they made their way to the taxi he had secured, which set off at a slow pace through the crowded side street.

Now that he had the opportunity of speaking with Catherine, Jim began to feel all the difficulties the subject presented. He felt again the anomaly of his position, and the powerful effect so obviously produced upon her by Swaine's acting made the subject seem still less easy of approach.

Catherine, on the contrary, seemed to find in the motion of the taxi an incentive to speech. Sitting up as the cab turned into the Strand, she spoke suddenly. "Jim," she said, "Mrs. Conway told me that you have booked your passage to Australia."

Jim replied that it was so, and Catherine continued: "I want to ask you something. I want you to tell me if it is really necessary that you should go."

Jim made a movement of distress and turned his head a little away to look out of the window at the passing traffic.

Catherine did not wait for him to reply.

"I know that I asked you this before," she went on, speaking quickly, "and that you told me it was necessary; but could you not change your plans and remain in London?"

Jim shook his head; he could not trust himself to speak.

There was a moment's silence while the taxi slowed down and came to a stop at a crossing. Catherine bent her face a little towards him and

spoke in a lower tone. "Jim," she said, "it's a very big favour, I know, and of course I have no right; but—could you not stay in England if I were to ask you to do so?"

Still Jim made no answer; his hands clenched themselves on his knee, and Catherine, after a moment's pause, went on: "I know you don't like being in London and that you have your work out there. But could you not find something in another part of England: perhaps in the country?"

"I am afraid not, Catherine." Jim had raised his voice as the cab started to move on again, and Catherine noticed that it sounded strangely hard and cold.

"Australia is so very far away," she said; "and I—Jim, I think if you knew how badly I need a friend you would stay." She raised her hands a little, clasping them nervously together.

Then all at once she began to tell him of the scene that had taken place between her mother and herself. "And mother said a terrible thing, Jim," she finished. "It—it was about my father. She said it was a good thing he was dead."

"My God, Catherine!—why?"

"So that he might not see me and know what I have become."

Jim sat staring at her as the light from the passing street lamps left her face with its crown of silver wheat in alternate radiance and shadow. A storm of resentment against Mrs. Arlsea shook him, followed by an almost

overwhelming desire to take Catherine away with him there and then and never to let her enter her mother's house again. Plans formed themselves rapidly in his mind. He could take Catherine on now in the taxi, find a home for her till his boat sailed, and eventually take her with him to Australia as his wife. It would all be so easy and so very desirable. He had money; he could give her a home and make her free. She would delight in the untrammelled life of the Colonies; and he understood and cared for her—so much. He drew a deep breath which ended in a choking cough.

With his hand at his side he turned to Catherine.

"What can I do?" he asked, and there was despair in his voice.

"I have no friend but you, Jim. O, do not leave me here alone!"

Jim bent forward, putting his hand to his face. "Don't make it harder for me," he said thickly. "For, Catherine, indeed I must go." He turned and took her hand. "It is not I who decide this, dear," he said. "It is destiny. I am helpless."

The despair in his voice kept Catherine silent, and for some moments there was no sound but the clicking of the engine and the buzz of the passing traffic.

Then she straightened herself and spoke firmly. "If you cannot help me, Jim, I must help myself."

"Does any course seem clear to you?"

"Yes; I must get away from home. I must go

anywhere or with anyone who will take me, no matter who it may be."

"Catherine!"

"I can't help it, Jim. I must find freedom to make my own life."

"If you should only mar it, child!"

Catherine shrugged her shoulders. "How can it be marred more than it already is? Is not the continual repression that I undergo more utterly ruinous than any mistake that I may make can ever turn out to be?"

Jim was silent. He knew that the personal aspect of the matter warped his judgment and prevented his giving an unbiased opinion.

"If I go on as I am," pursued Catherine, "I shall never really have lived at all. Indeed, I think I cannot do so. My present life is becoming intolerable to me. If, on the other hand, I continue at home but make a determined stand for freedom—which is, I suppose, what you would suggest my doing—it will not only mean the loss of all peace of mind while the struggle lasts, but that in the end I shall be beaten."

"Surely not, Catherine, if you can only be firm."

"I think so, Jim. My mother is very determined, and she has an unaccountable power of making me feel that in the end nothing is worth fighting for. Just as if a steam-roller had gone over everything and rolled it all out flat. I should have been beaten over that library subscription had it not been for you."

"There is your intellectual life, Catherine," Jim spoke desperately, "and your attempt at literary work."

Catherine shook her head. "That is just one of the things that forces me to my decision. I feel that, never having lived, I cannot hope to write about life, and the daily repression seems to act in some odd way upon my mind and prevent what I feel to be really there from coming to the surface."

"Catherine, your father—forgive me, dear—would he find it well?"

Catherine pressed her hand against her breast. "I don't know," she said painfully. "I have thought greatly of it, of course. I don't know."

The taxi was running along Cromwell Road and the wheels made little noise on the wooden pavement.

Catherine was staring straight in front of her. She seemed to have forgotten Jim's presence, and spoke as though to herself.

"No help comes from the dead," she said; "and if his spirit still lives, he must understand that, being forced to remain in the world, I must try to shape my own life. It is true that he has showed me the path, but I alone can tread it."

"Have you any scheme in your mind, Catherine?" asked Jim presently.

"My first idea was to speak with you, and ask you if it were possible you should change your plans. This is the last time I will ever ask you,

Jim. Does this that I have told you make no difference? "

Jim leaned back in his seat so that his face was in shadow.

"Catherine," he said, "do you believe that I am 'straight'?"

"Yes, Jim."

"Then I give you my word of honour that if it lay in my power, at any cost to myself, to do what you ask, I would do it. For there is no sacrifice I would consider too great to make in order to help you. Try to believe me, dear, when I tell you that the hardest words I have ever been obliged to utter are those that I speak when I say to you 'I cannot.'"

They were in Gloucester Road now, and as the cab slowed down Catherine stirred a little and drew a deep sigh. "I will never speak of it again," she said.

They stopped at Number 18, where Jim saw Catherine into the house and returned to the cab, and as it moved off again he leaned back in one corner with a feeling of complete mental exhaustion. The half hour that had just passed seemed to him to be one of the most dreadful that he had ever experienced. Now, as he gazed with unseeing eyes out on to the dark roadway, the thought uppermost in his mind was a prayer that he might not live to experience such another. Then he put aside his own misery and turned to the consideration of Catherine's problem. Her position seemed to him to be intolerable; he felt that

she was right in saying that it was impossible she could much longer endure her present life of repression. It was warping her mind and impeding her development. What would become of her? He moved restlessly, asking himself who would help her. She had said she must go with anyone who was willing to take her.

What if she should be so mad as to run away with some man—with Norman Swaine? Ah, it was out! He smiled grimly. So he was jealous of Norman Swaine! A pretty exhibition of the dog-in-the-manger attitude, truly! He forced himself to consider Swaine as he had seen him leaving the stage half an hour ago, his well-built figure erect and dignified. He was certainly more than usually attractive: it was plain that most of the women in the audience found him so. And he was a talented actor, and Jim believed that he was capable of adapting himself to any rôle that he might desire to play, whether on or off the stage.

A vivid recollection of Catherine's expression as the lights in the auditorium went up seized Jim. Martin had turned and spoken to her, saying something about the climax of the play, but she had not seemed to hear his words and had made no reply. Martin was a sound man, and his sister looked shrewd and capable; Jim wished that Catherine could have her for a friend.

She had seemed kindly disposed toward Catherine, he thought.

He wished he could speak with her about it.

But how could he do so? He had never met her till that evening, though he knew Martin tolerably well, having seen something of him at Swaine's flat from time to time.

It struck him that he might speak to Martin and ask him to get his sister to befriend Catherine. He turned the matter over in his mind, and the end of it was that before the cab had reached his mother's house he had decided to go down to Ealing on the following evening while Swaine was at the theatre.

As the cab stopped, Jim noticed something shining on the floor. He picked it up and found it was an ear of silver wheat from the wreath that Catherine had worn in her hair.

He paid the fare and dismissed the taxi; then, entering the house, he shut and locked the door and switched on the light. Standing in the hall he drew out a pocket-book, opened it, and laid the silver wheat-ear carefully inside.

And at this moment Swaine, having finished his talk with Martin, was standing before the mirror in his dressing-room at the theatre, wiping the grease-paint from his face with a towel and congratulating himself that never in his life had he acted to better purpose than on that evening.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WRITING ON THE FAN

MRS. ARLSEA came down to breakfast on the following morning in a more than usually irritable frame of mind. In the first place Carr, whom Mrs. Conway had promised should be of the party on the previous evening, had not turned up. Mrs. Arlsea had taken a dislike to Mrs. Wilton, whose shrewd discernment she suspected of having weighed her and found her wanting. The conduct, too, of Jim Conway in securing Catherine's society on the drive home from the theatre annoyed her considerably, and when to her query as to what had passed between them Catherine made only a slight and evasive reply, she proceeded to denounce Jim as a selfish and ungrateful son, as shown by his determination to return to Australia contrary to the expressed wish of his mother.

"There is nothing so terrible as an ungrateful child," she remarked plaintively. "To think of all the trouble Mrs. Conway has taken with her son's education and the large sum of money that has been spent upon it, and how, in return for all this, he insists upon going out to a half-civilized place like Queensland. I sympathize deeply with Mrs. Conway."

Catherine wondered anew why so much gratitude was expected from children in return for an unsolicited introduction to a doubtfully congenial world, and remained silent.

Mrs. Arlsea, as she poured herself out a second cup of tea, threw her daughter a sharp glance and experienced a fresh sense of irritation at her silence. "I think Jim Conway might at least let his mother know the reason for his persistence in leaving England," she said. "I have no patience with people who make a practice of concealment. It is most deceitful."

"I am sure Jim is not deceitful."

"Indeed! And may I enquire what you know about Jim? Your knowledge of men is somewhat limited, I believe!"

"My knowledge of everything is limited. But I am sure that if Jim gives his mother a reason for returning to Australia it is a true one."

"That's just the point. He gives no reason. It is what Mrs. Conway finds so annoying."

Catherine buttered a piece of toast thoughtfully. "I don't see that she has any right to be annoyed," she remarked.

"On the contrary, a mother has every right to her child's confidence."

"To a child's, possibly; but Jim is a man."

"Really, Catherine," Mrs. Arlsea stirred her tea impatiently, "you are acquiring a very objectionable habit of arguing. Jim's age has nothing whatever to do with the question. It

simply shows, of course, that he is concealing something disgraceful, else why should he be ashamed to confess it to his mother?"

"Aren't you being rather hard on Jim?"

"I am not at all 'hard on Jim,'" mimicked Mrs. Arlsea. "For you see I happen to know his reason for being so determined on returning to that ranch of his."

"You know his reason?"

"Yes. I know that he is married to a woman out there."

Catherine laid down her knife and fork and looked at her mother in astonishment.

"Married!" she said; "did he tell you so?"

"No, but I know it all the same."

Catherine pondered the matter. "I think he would tell Mrs. Conway so, if that were true," she said in puzzled tones.

"You are such a baby, Catherine. You don't understand these things. He is married to a woman of inferior social position—a shrew, in fact. I had it from someone who has been out there and who knows his wife."

Catherine rose from the table. "I hope he will be happy," she said in an odd, far-away tone. "He certainly deserves to be so."

Mrs. Arlsea made an impatient movement. "He deserves a good shaking for being such a fool as to marry beneath him," she said, "and for his treatment of his mother as well; and if I were she I would see that he got it. I wish you would not rise from the table before I do,

Catherine ; I have often told you it is ill-mannered to do so."

Catherine, who was half-way to the door, paused and looked at the clock. "It is the day for my French lesson," she said, "and I have something to prepare."

She left the room, and going into the drawing-room she took up her French books and seated herself in a corner of the sofa.

A queer feeling of having suddenly found herself in a new world seized her.

She tried to brush aside her mother's statement as being untrue, and failed. That Jim had some very urgent reason for his return to Queensland was too obvious to need consideration ; and that it was one he was determined against declaring was also evident. The story was probable enough. But how strange, Catherine thought ; and then asked herself why she should find it so. Why should it appear odd that Jim was married ?

The answer presented itself quickly enough. Because she had believed him to care for herself ! Yet he had told her that he must go away and had given her no hint of a wish to take her with him. He must have understood during their talk last night that she would gladly have gone.

"You must be pretty conceited," Catherine told herself mockingly ; "one of those idiotic girls who see in every man a possible husband, and you persist in including Jim among the number in spite of the obvious fact that he thinks of you only as a friend." Then she stirred uneasily.

It was not that Jim had deceived her—no, not deceived, for she had no right to his confidence—that mattered, but the fact that she did not really know him.

The Jim she had known all these months was a mythical Jim. The real one was a man who had led a wild life in the Colonies and had married beneath him. Catherine shivered. She felt almost as though in the presence of death. Jim, the old honest, courageous, mocking Jim, was dead. She must learn to know a new man in his place, one whose life had been different.

Well, it would not be for long. Soon he would be gone away and she would see him no more. The thought was almost a relief: for when the new Jim had gone, perhaps the old one would come back to her in memory. Memory! Yes, that might be. But where now should she turn for help in action and life, Jim being dead?

A step crossed the hall and she hastily spread her book open upon her lap. The maid entered carrying a small parcel, which she said had been brought by a special messenger. "It was to be given you when you were alone, miss," she added with a grin.

Catherine took the packet. It was addressed to "Miss C. Arlsea" and carefully sealed at the ends with gold wax. She broke open the seals and undid the wrappings. Inside was an ivory fan, very beautifully modelled in imitation of lace.

Bending her head to examine the delicate tracery,

Catherine saw that there was some writing on one of the sticks, finely inscribed as though with an etching pen. She carried it to the window and read :

Use the fan. I will be at the tea-place in Kensington Gardens from three till five every day until you come.

N. S.

Catherine let the hand holding the fan fall by her side and stood staring out into the busy street.

CHAPTER XIV

MARTIN "STANDS BY"

"SHALL I disturb you in your work, Martin?" asked Jim Conway as he entered the drawing-room of the flat that evening.

Martin pulled forward a chair. "No, certainly not," he said. "And as a matter of fact I was not writing. The muse is coy to-night and it will be pleasant to have a chat. Swaine, of course, is at the theatre."

Jim nodded. "That is my reason for coming at this hour," he said. "I wanted to talk to you. No, thanks, I won't smoke; I have had to give it up on account of my cough."

Martin knocked out his pipe on the bars of the grate without speaking and seated himself opposite Jim, who continued:

"The fact is, I have been getting rapidly worse lately, and this is the reason for my decision to return immediately to Queensland, as you have probably heard I intend to do."

Martin let his eyes rest on Jim's tired face in silence. He possessed the rare faculty of expressing sympathy without putting it into words.

Jim pushed his fingers through his whitening

hair. "I have not many months to live," he said quietly.

Martin made a little movement of his hand upon the arm of his chair, and Jim met his eyes with a slow smile and added: "It will be easier out there."

"Yes," said Martin quietly; "yes, I see that it will."

The silence that followed was broken by Jim's cough. "I didn't come here to talk about myself, Martin," he said. "I came to ask you if you would take charge of something for me—a letter." He drew one out of his pocket as he spoke. "It is addressed to Miss Arlsea. I want you to give it into her own hands when you hear of my death."

Martin took the letter. He crossed the room to a small safe which stood in a corner, and drawing a bunch of keys from his pocket, he selected one, opened the safe, and deposited the envelope within it. Then he relocked the safe and returned to his chair. "I think you know that you can trust me," was all he said.

Jim smiled. "Otherwise I should not be here," he replied, and added: "It was not alone to ask you to receive the letter that I came; there was also another thought in my mind."

Martin nodded. "I will hear anything you wish to tell me," he said.

Jim bent forward and rested his elbow on the arm of his chair. "It is, I know, a very unconventional errand," he said, "and only the circumstances that I have related to you about myself

would justify me in discussing the matter at all. . . . The fact is that I am very much concerned about Miss Arlsea."

A look of anxiety flickered across Martin's face, but Jim did not see it and he went on, speaking slowly. "She is not happy in her home-life," he said, "and latterly the strain of repression has been very great. I do not think she will endure it much longer. She is a girl of spirit and of great courage."

"Yes," Martin said; "I have perceived that to be in her."

"Under the circumstances that I have explained to you I am helpless; otherwise I would gladly have taken her with me to Queensland as my wife, had she been willing to go."

Martin was listening attentively. "What do you wish me to do?" he asked.

"It seems to me so desirable that Catherine should find friends in your sister and yourself."

Martin smiled. "I think she has already one in Clare," he said, "and for myself I could easily promise it. Do you feel that you could tell me what it is you fear for her?"

Jim put his hand to his head with a troubled gesture.

"It might make my friendship more serviceable to Miss Arlsea if I knew," added Martin gently.

After a moment's consideration Jim replied: "Catherine is growing desperate. I think she is on the point of taking any chance that may present itself, rather than remain under her

mother's roof." He fixed his eyes suddenly on Martin's face. "Swaine is your friend," he said.

Martin started visibly. He met Jim's gaze for a moment and then turned his face a little away. "We have shared this flat for three years," he said slowly. "He goes his way and I go mine. I do not find him a difficult man to live with."

"No," said Jim, "possibly not; but for a woman——"

Martin rose from his chair, and going to the table he took up an ivory paper-knife that was lying there and bent it absent-mindedly in his hands.

Jim Conway sat listening to the insistent tick of the clock, his eyes on a preposterous green-china cat that sat on the mantelpiece and leered at him above the bow adorning its elongated neck.

Presently Martin laid the paper-knife back upon the table and returned to his chair. "Swaine has a certain strength," he said slowly; "he is neither malicious nor petty and he can be generous, exceedingly so with money. But you have known him longer than I have, Conway."

A faint smile curved Jim's lips.

"Yes," he said drily; "that's just it."

The silence threatened to become lengthy. Martin felt all the difficulties both of the subject and of the circumstances under which they were discussing it, and Jim appeared to be almost oblivious of Martin's presence.

Suddenly he stirred and spoke.

"The whole social system is rotten in the extreme," he said.

Martin turned an enquiring gaze upon him. "If you refer to the manner in which girls are brought up, I agree with you."

"That of course; but the whole system of intercourse between men and women is erected upon a false basis and leads to incalculable evil."

"How would you propose to remedy it?"

"I would propose that people should be regarded as human beings, as we all primarily are, and that sex, which is after all a mere accident of birth, should not be given the all-dominating consideration it now commands."

"Yet, you must admit that the attribute of sex is a very fundamental one. Our entire lives, characters and thought are coloured by it."

"Certainly," Jim answered, "and I would make every allowance for the accident; just as I should expect one man to be stronger than another, or one woman more attractive than another. But that all reasonable intercourse should be denied two human beings merely because they happen to be of different sex—well, it seems to me to be an arrangement that has nothing to recommend it except custom. How many unhappy marriages or unfortunate love affairs do you think could be avoided if those concerned were able to discuss the matter freely? Half of them in being dragged out into the light of day would lose their romance at the same time

as their mystery, and would be seen clearly as unsuitable and irksome undertakings."

"There I certainly agree with you," Martin said.

"And, as usual," continued Jim, "all this falls more heavily on the woman. For the man has a certain freedom of action."

"Which he abuses, more often than not."

"Yes, I grant you that. But even in this very abuse there is gain. To know life as it really is, one must know alike the worthless and the good. What chance is given to a young and ignorant girl of acquiring that judgment that is so necessary a factor in life? How many women have been shipwrecked utterly because they do not recognize the false when they see it?"

Martin raised his eyes to Jim's intent face. "I think, Conway," he said quietly, "that you have here a hopeful reflection for your present matter of concern."

"Why do you say that, Martin?"

"The best, indeed the only way for a woman to understand unworthiness is to live with it at close quarters."

Jim winced.

"I fear that has a brutal sound," Martin said gently. "We shade the lamp of truth so carefully that when we uncover it our eyes are hurt."

"One is up against the system again," answered Jim slowly. "For while a man's concern is with life in such a case, a woman's is with convention."

"If the woman's character and understanding

are perfected, would you not consider the conventionalities happily disregarded ? ”

“ As far as I am concerned, yes. But the woman's social happiness may be wrecked.”

“ She will not be the less respected by those whose good opinion is worthy of regard,” replied Martin. “ The rest is a matter of courage. And I don't think you, Conway, need to be told by another that courage is the great thing to be striven for. Life is to the brave.”

Jim sighed. “ I think it is rather to the free,” he said.

“ Those only are free who can be brave.”

Jim made no answer ; he leaned his face on his hand.

“ Don't you see, Conway, that in labouring to prevent what now seems to you to be a catastrophe, we should, even if we succeeded, only be carrying on those methods of repression which you find so evil ? ”

Jim remained silent for some moments. Then he said, “ Put yourself in my place, Martin. Do you think you could still continue to regard the matter in the light in which you have laid it before me to-night ? ”

Martin spoke low and earnestly. “ Perhaps I stand nearer to your own position with regard to Miss Arlsea than you know of, Conway.”

Jim started a little ; he raised his head and looked searchingly at Martin, who met his gaze frankly.

A slow smile touched Jim's lips. “ I see that you have that which you tell me you value,” he said. “ Courage.”

Martin was silent ; there seemed no more to say, and the two sat on for a time speaking in monosyllables and listening to the clock ticking and the hum of traffic outside.

Jim Conway was thinking that he had done right in coming there that evening and hoping that, whatever storms Catherine's barque of life might have to weather, it would come at last into port under the guiding mind of the quiet man who sat beside him ; and that he, Jim, had now done all that he could do, and might go on his journey in peace.

Presently he rose, saying that Swaine would be coming home soon and that he preferred not to meet him that evening.

Martin accompanied him into the hall, and when they reached the hall door Jim turned and held out his hand. " I want to thank you for your frankness," he said. " I shall sleep now with a quiet mind."

Martin made no answer in words. They gripped hands in silence and Jim went down the outer stairs.

When the sound of his footsteps had died away, Martin returned to the room and sat down in the chair Jim had vacated.

For a long while he sat motionless, staring into space, the grotesque cat seeming to eye him sardonically from the mantelpiece and the two Chinese monsters on top of the bookcase staring over his head with a self-satisfied smirk on their painted lips.

CHAPTER XV

LILY SEES BEHIND THE FAN

SOME weeks elapsed between the day on which Catherine had received the ivory fan and her next meeting with Lily Kellaway.

The reason for this was partly that Lily, having been taken to task by Mrs. Arlsea, had turned sulky and refused to visit Catherine, and partly that she had been away for a fortnight, staying with Mrs. Conway's eldest daughter.

However, one day, a week or two after her return to Town, she presented herself at the house in Gloucester Road, and as Mrs. Arlsea was not at home, the two girls had tea brought to them in the dining-room, where Catherine was at work on a piece of French translation.

Lily had apparently forgotten that she believed herself to have cause for offence, and during tea she entertained Catherine with an account of her doings at the Salfords'.

The chief feature of the visit appeared to be that Herbert Carr had been a member of the house-party and had, according to Lily's statement, distinguished her by his attentions. It seemed there had been some competition for this gentleman's favours, and it was therefore not

without pride that Lily related certain episodes calculated to emphasize his preference for her. She recounted with gusto a passage at arms that had taken place between herself and one Maud Hobson, the matter of contention having been the spare place in a certain two-seater car, and over which Lily proclaimed herself to have won a notorious victory.

"And when Maud found that she was beaten, she had the cheek to suggest that we should make up a party and go in the Rolls," Lily said, adding complacently: "But Carr soon saw through her dodge, with a little help from me!"

Catherine, who appeared inattentive, roused herself to enquire what this Mr. Carr was like.

"O, all right," Lily replied carelessly; "a big fair man; rather a softy, you know, though he's frightfully rich. But I thought you had met him at the Conways' last week. He's certainly met your mother there."

"I couldn't go," said Catherine; "I—I had a headache."

"Had a headache? Why, whatever is the matter with your head? This is about the fourth headache I've heard of your having lately."

Catherine did not reply. She took up a spoon and carefully removed a tea-leaf that was floating upon the surface of her tea.

Lily regarded her critically. There was something unusual about Catherine, she thought;

a queer reserved air that made her appear older.

"Seen anything of Norman Swaine lately?" she asked abruptly, on a thought.

Catherine's face became a shade more pink. She laid the spoon down and raised the teacup to her lips as she replied:

"He has not been here since the day we went to Ealing."

Lily noted the blush and the evasion, and her lips shaped themselves into a whistle. "What colour is his new tea-set?" she demanded; "have you seen it?"

Catherine looked straightly at her. "Yes," she said; "it's green."

"Well, I'm damned!" said Lily concisely.

She leaned back and surveyed Catherine, who was now looking straight before her, with head erect and a patch of colour showing on either cheek.

All at once Lily broke into a fit of laughter. "It's the best joke I've heard for months," she ejaculated; "it really is! Here's your mother been going on at the Conways' because you are getting so many headaches from eye-strain! Over-reading! Over-study! O my Lord! And Jim Conway solemnly listening and arguing! Does he know?"

"Know what?"

"Know what! Know that this supposed malady of the head is really, so to speak, a malady of the heart?"

Catherine's flush deepened. "I don't know what he knows or doesn't know," she said, "and I wish you'd leave Jim out of it, Lily."

"He has taken himself out of it," replied Lily. "I suppose you know he sailed last week in the *Atalanta*?"

"Yes, of course I know. He came to say good-bye. Mother was here," added Catherine, "so I didn't see him alone."

"There'll be the devil to pay with your mother when she finds out about Norman Swaine," chuckled Lily. "What are you going to tell her?"

Catherine made a movement of impatience. "The same as I have told you," she said; "nothing."

"It looks like nothing! And I don't see how you are going to keep up the game. You can't go on having headaches."

"No. But I might develop an inclination to travel!"

Lily's mouth opened. "Never!" she exclaimed.

Meeting her astonished gaze, Catherine suddenly laughed. "Don't look so dumbfounded, Lily," she said. "After all, you know, I'm only human, and life at home here has its disadvantages."

"So will life with Mr. S., or I'm much mistaken," was Lily's retort when she had found her voice.

Catherine shrugged her shoulders. "Quite so," she said. "They will, however, be of a different nature, and that will make a variety."

Lily reached out for a biscuit and crumbled

it thoughtfully. "Are you going to marry him?" she asked.

Catherine replied quietly that she was not, and to Lily's enquiry as to the reason, answered that he had not asked her to marry him. "And had he done so," she added, "I should have refused."

"Why?"

"Because he is not the kind of man I should be willing to marry. I don't respect him sufficiently."

"You'll respect him less before you've done with him," said Lily cattishly.

"Very likely. It will then be a matter for congratulation that I am not tied to him for life."

Lily finished her tea, and pushing her chair back from the table, took out a cigarette.

"This beats all I've ever heard," she said, as she struck a match. "If it had been Nora Wylie now, or that Hobson girl, I could have understood it. But you—it's no wonder they say the quiet ones are deep."

Catherine's colour rose a little. "You admit that you are yourself going to marry for money, Lily," she said.

"Yes, my dear." Lily blew out the match with a puff. "I am. But not minus the ceremony. You don't catch me making myself cheap."

"A winter in the South of France is not to be had cheap," said Catherine indifferently.

Lily gave her a shrewd look. "You'll not

tell me you are lending yourself to a bribe like that," she said.

"No," replied Catherine, "I certainly will not; for I am lending myself to no bribe. I am becoming unable to endure my present barren existence. And, being given the opportunity to live, I'm going to seize it. That's all."

"Well," said Lily, after a pause, "I admire your pluck in taking it on."

"I don't see that it requires any more pluck than your scheme to marry a rich man whom you do not love—this Mr. Carr, for instance. In fact, it seems to me to require less, because I shall be able to get away when I've had enough of it, whereas you will be bound for life."

"But, Catherine, the scandal; have you thought——"

"Thought!" broke out Catherine. "O yes, I've thought. I've thought till I'm wretched." She rose from the table and crossed to the window, where she stood looking out. "I am sick of thinking, I tell you. I want to live and act. I want to see the world. I want to be a human being, for a change, and not a parrot in a cage——"

She stopped abruptly, and the silence was only broken by her quick breathing and Lily's puffs at her cigarette.

Suddenly the latter said, "I shall write to Jim."

"If you mean that you will betray my plans to him you need not trouble."

"He surely doesn't know?"

"Not the details; but he knew I was up against the end of things here."

"And yet he went away," said Lily incredulously; "a pretty friend! He might at least have offered to take you with him."

"He could not, because he has a wife out there who might object."

"A wife!" Lily stared with rising incredulity. "I don't believe it," she said curtly.

"O, it is true enough. My mother told me."

Lily's face expressed contempt. "Your mother's a fool over gossip; a baby could hoodwink her. The way she's setting her cap at Carr, too, is preposterous, and wouldn't deceive a rabbit! Even Carr can see through it."

"Again with a little assistance from you, I suppose," said Catherine with a mirthless laugh.

"Just so. And remember, Miss Catherine, I am now in possession of certain information concerning yourself."

"Which you will doubtless make use of at the first opportunity."

Lily laughed with a sudden return of good-humour. "I don't know that I shall," she said. "It would spoil my intense enjoyment of your mother's expression when she finds it all out! She's sure to come round to Mrs. Conway's with a song about it—and may I be there to hear!"

Catherine said nothing, and when Lily had

finished her cigarette she suddenly rose, and coming to where Catherine stood at the window, she held out her hand.

' Shake hands, Catherine,' she said. " I admire your pluck, old girl ; and your secret shall be safe as far as I am concerned."

Catherine took her hand readily enough. " Good-bye, Lily," she answered. " You've had some boring times, trailing me round. It's been very good of you to put up with me for so long, and you must be glad it's over."

The girls held hands for a moment and Lily blinked a little, then she pulled hers away. " Give my love to Norman Swaine," she called from the door. " Tell him I did the best I could for you when I broke that tea-set ! " And in another moment she was gone.

Catherine stood quietly by the window. She was thinking of Jim. How quick Lily had been in her rejection of the story concerning his marriage ! What if she herself had lent a too ready credence to the gossip ? Well, there was no use pondering over the matter any longer. Jim was gone, and it was an indisputable fact that, married or not, he had not invited her company.

She took a letter from her pocket and read it through carefully. Then she went to the table and wrote an answer.

This answer began " My dear Norman " and agreed to certain arrangements connected with a meeting at Victoria Station, to take place within the following week.

And late that night, under the radiance of the Southern moon, set silver in a sky of indigo, Jim Conway stood leaning over the rail of a great liner.

The moonlight made a silver ladder over the dark waters, touched his whitening hair and gleamed bright on something that lay in the palm of his hand, resting open before him upon the rail. It was a single ear of wheat, daintily wrought in silver, and had once served as an ornament for the hair of a girl.

The ship rode steadily over the quiet sea ; her wake glimmered phosphorescent behind her : and far below Jim could see the silver globes of hundreds of phosphorescent jelly-fish gleaming large and dim or small and bright as the creatures alternately expanded or contracted in swimming.

There was little sound, save the rhythmic beat of the ship's engines, the creak of the rigging above, and the low laughter of a pair of unseen lovers.

Suddenly from below in the music-room a woman's voice in a contralto key began to sing. The song was " Three Fishers," and the words of its refrain floated softly up to where Jim stood under the silver radiance of the moon :

For men must work and women must weep ;
And the sooner it's over, the sooner to sleep.

BOOK II

Life, like a dome of many coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity.

Adonais : SHELLEY.

CHAPTER I

"LE JEU EST FAIT"

THE January sunlight glinted on the *Base des Anges* and struck clear-cut shadows westwards from the white-walled buildings bordering the *Promenade des Anglais*. The winter season at Nice was at its height, and that side of the promenade nearest the sea was thronged with folk, the dark garments of the men throwing into more striking relief the gay silks and flower-decked millinery of the women. A band was playing in the *Jardin Publique* and a constant stream of carriages and motors passed and repassed along the straight white road.

In one of these motors, which was drawn up outside an exchange, sat a woman to whom few of the passers-by failed to give a second glance. She was a long-limbed, brown-haired English-woman, with the clear natural complexion peculiar to her race and deep grey eyes whose serious expression somehow seemed at variance with the studied smartness of her dress—a blue silk of a shade mid-way between sapphire and indigo, the colour of which was repeated in the sweeping curve of her wide-brimmed hat, broken only by a single rose of a violet tint. In her ears were

long lapis-lazuli ear-rings, and the low neck of her gown was fastened by a lapis-lazuli pin, curiously cut into the form of a dragon-fly.

She had opened a blue-silk parasol against the gleam of the sunlight and lay back gazing out across the waters of the bay.

Two Russians passing close to the car stared and spoke some loud comment in their harsh tongue, a woman lifted disparaging lorgnettes, and an Englishman mounting the steps of the exchange with a friend remarked to his companion that, when all was said, there was nothing like an English-woman for style. To which the other assented, and they passed into the building on a murmured speculation as to the lady's probable age. It might have been anything from sixteen to thirty, they decided; and as a matter of fact Catherine Arlsea was now entering upon her twentieth year.

She had, within the past five months, changed almost beyond recognition, for her girlhood had been left behind and she had become a woman. All her shyness had fallen away from her, and the air of mature dignity and self-possession that had taken its place greatly added to her apparent age. Some of the wistfulness that had been part of her charm still lingered in the deeps of her eyes, but their steady gaze out on to the bay expressed self-reliance, eager intelligence, and, above all, courage.

A man emerged from the exchange and came down the steps. He was a very large man, tall and broad and exceptionally handsome.

His attire was perfect in cut and unobtrusive in colour. He carried a paper roll in his hand, and having contemplated the woman in the car with an approving smile from the altitude of the steps, he descended and touched her playfully on the shoulder.

"Norman! How you startled me! I was looking at the sea."

Swaine laughed. "Here is something better for you to look at," he said; "bank-notes!" He flung the roll lightly into her lap and turned to the chauffeur, whom he addressed in exceedingly bad French. Catherine laid her hand lightly upon the packet, but she kept her eyes on Swaine, at whom two girls stared in passing, one with a hand reached out to touch her companion's arm. There were few women in Nice, whether English or foreign, who did not regard Swaine with admiration, and more often than not Catherine perceived the glance to be followed by one of envy or hostility towards herself.

Having given his directions to the driver, Swaine got into the car. "I wonder when we shall all talk Esperanto," he said with a mock groan, as he seated himself, "and why the French are supposed to be such an intelligent race!"

Catherine laughed, a low laugh that was very pleasant to the ear, and Norman turned and ran his eye over her tall figure.

"I think you are too blue this morning, Kitty," he said. "A spray of pink roses now, or perhaps

a violet orchid or two——" He leaned forward and gave a fresh direction to the driver.

Catherine laughed again as she handed him back the roll of notes. "If you're going to the *Rue Paradis* for orchids, you'll need them all!" she remarked. "Could we go on towards the *Var* afterwards, Norman? I should like to be near the sea."

Norman grimaced. "It's so dull out there," he objected; "let's stick to the promenade. If you like, we can go out along the *Corniche* after *déjeuner*."

Catherine merely nodded, and they stopped at the florist's, where Swaine brought out a handful of blooms for her choice.

He was always at his best when spending money, which he was in the habit of regarding with the utmost lightness. Indeed, one of the first surprises Catherine remembered in connection with her new life was his entire carelessness as to terms and charges.

As they moved off slowly along the crowded promenade, she found herself recalling this and other of her early sensations.

At first she had been taken up with a struggle against a not unnatural timidity. Swaine had shown himself masterful and, in a sense, exacting, and she had soon discovered that the surest way in which to irritate him was to show fear. She recalled an occasion during the first week of their being together when his sudden entry into the room where she was dressing for dinner had

caused her involuntarily to start and shrink back.

"My dear girl," he had exclaimed testily, "you're not in the harem of a Turk, you know! If you prefer to be alone, say so, or lock the door. But for Heaven's sake don't stand there and shiver!" And he would have gone out again, but she had called him back with a frank apology that had caused him to advance and pull her uncoiled hair with a laughing, "All right, Kitty. Only do remember I'm not a boggy—or your mother!"

Realizing that his annoyance was justified, Catherine had at once set herself to lay aside her diffidence, and in this she succeeded the more rapidly in view of the fact that, for her, life had become so much more free. There was, she had soon discovered, no need for her to ask permission to go out of doors, and in like manner no account of her actions was demanded from her on her return. "Push off, Kit," Norman would say. "I've got some letters to write this morning," or, "So and so's asked me to give him a game of billiards. I suppose you can amuse yourself?" And Catherine would spend hours sauntering up and down the streets, looking at the shops or the sea, or walking on the wooded heights of *Mont Boron*, with the sheer delight of freedom shouting in her blood. And she would return to their rooms with swinging step and heightened colour, and refuse to utter a word in answer to Norman's laughing query. "I may have been

anywhere," she would say, "and I needn't tell you, need I, Norman?" and Swaine's half-laughing, half-indifferent acquiescence in her silence constituted for her one of his greatest charms.

Another of his attractions was his quite exceptional delight in colour. They had spent a week in Paris on their way southwards, and Swaine had ransacked the shops to give Catherine the gowns he thought she ought to wear. He would sit watching her dress of an evening, smoking and swinging his long legs while he criticized her style and colouring.

"Yellow!" he had exclaimed one evening, while so employed, "that's the colour I think we'd better try," and he waved aside Catherine's expostulation that she was too fair. "What you mean by yellow is probably not my idea of the thing," he had said; "it must be orange or goldy-browns."

And they had spent most of the following day on a quest for the appropriate garments, with the result that when Catherine beheld herself in the long mirror of her wardrobe, attired in clinging flame-coloured draperies embroidered in shades of burnt-sienna and brown silks with a gold thread running through the intricacies of their pattern, a gold girdle at her waist and a fillet of golden discs round her brown hair, she had gazed at her own reflection in delight, and had then turned to Swaine with a whole-hearted admission of his discernment. "I pictured a buttercup when you

said yellow, Norman!" she had said; "I never imagined anything like this: it's simply great, and I'll never offer an opinion on colour against yours again." Whereat Norman had been much gratified, and had noted the effect of her entrance into the hotel dining-room that evening with immense complacency.

His gratification suffered no diminution as time went on. Catherine improved daily in appearance and demeanour under the influence both of his taste and the content of her unaccustomed freedom. She matured rapidly in appearance, and a certain languor which had characterized her movements gave place to a firm and dignified assurance. It would have been highly displeasing to Swaine to have felt that she was in any way inferior. He was himself so used to excite interest and admiration that the sensation had lost for him its gratification, and he found a much more subtle flattery in the envy aroused in the breast of his male acquaintances by his possession of Catherine. He liked to walk a little behind her on the crowded promenade and observe the glances of interest that followed her as she passed. Catherine's quiet acceptance of such admiration as forced itself upon her notice also pleased him. It was so entirely what he would have desired, in its absence of "side" on the one hand or undue gratification on the other. Altogether Swaine was disposed to congratulate himself heartily upon his acuteness in having penetrated the shy exterior of the school-girl and discerned

underneath it the possibilities latent for the woman.

Catherine's attitude towards himself also pleased him not a little. She never became sentimental, and the feminine wiles and cajoleries were tricks unknown to her. On the other hand, she relied upon him for direction in all social emergencies and never hesitated to confess ignorance and ask his advice or assistance; and this gained, it was invariably followed and remembered by her for guidance on future occasions.

To Swaine, sated as he was by the stale tricks and transparent deceits of his actress acquaintances, this frank comradeship had all the charm of novelty, and in the interest of superintending her development he appeared to his best advantage. He taught her to ride, to improve her rather erratic tennis, and, at her urgent request, to drive a car. They were continually together in the exercise of some pursuit, and in the hotels where they stayed, Mr. and Mrs. Swaine were regarded as models of devotion—if with an occasional wink in the smoking-room or a look askance from a dowager, well, the glance slid harmlessly off Catherine's dignity, and Swaine returned the wink with a laugh and a proffered cocktail. And, as a man who passed them that January morning in the car remarked in response to an innuendo of his companion, "In any case I envy him his taste—she's a deuced fine girl, whoever she is."

After *déjeuner* Norman went to the office of

the hotel and returned carrying a packet of letters to where Catherine was smoking a cigarette in the lounge.

He turned them over carelessly, flinging aside circulars, newspapers and theatrical advertisements, until he came to a letter bearing the Ealing postmark. "Martin's becoming quite a good correspondent," he remarked; "this is the third letter I have had from him within a fortnight. Here is one enclosed for you, Catherine—from his sister, he says."

Catherine took the letter with a sense of pleasure. Clare Wilton's were the only letters she ever received; in fact, Martin and his sister alone knew of her whereabouts. Martin had undertaken to forward Swaine's correspondence from the flat at Ealing, and had almost immediately enclosed one from his sister to Catherine, asking that Swaine should forward it if he knew of her address. It had contained only a few words of friendly greeting and a request that Catherine would reply. This, after a little consideration, she had decided to do; Swaine, with the easy tolerance of one whose position is assured, making no difficulties and merely stipulating that their whereabouts should not be divulged to Mrs. Arlsea or any of their other acquaintance. "Martin's all right," he said, "dull, but straight. But you never can trust a woman." Catherine was, of course, even more anxious that this should not be the case, and so it was under a compact of strict secrecy that a correspondence was com-

menced between the two women. Mrs. Wilton wrote a clever letter, and below the penetrating shrewdness of her remarks ran a current of real understanding and friendly affection which Catherine, situated as she was, had not been slow to appreciate.

On this occasion the perusal of Clare's letter was interrupted by a laugh from Norman. Catherine looked up, a gleam of amusement in her eyes. "You have the same news as I find in mine, Norman—Lily's engagement."

"And to Herbert Carr of all people," laughed Norman. "How in the world did she manage it? Took some doing, I expect. Carr's a wily bird, for all his good-natured exterior." Norman lit a cigarette and laughed again. "I was thinking of your mother's face when she heard it, Kitty!" he explained. "I'd give something to have seen it!"

Catherine shrugged her shoulders. "She must be getting used to shocks," she remarked with a flash of bitterness.

Norman regarded her with amusement. He felt that he could afford to be tolerant, having won so complete a victory over Mrs. Arlsea. Not so Catherine, whose present freedom only served to accentuate her resentment at recollected tyrannies.

She folded up Clare's letter and stuck it in her cigarette-case, which she closed with a snap, and fell to brooding.

With the mention of her mother's name a

hundred irksome recollections assailed her: memories of indignities suffered, of absurd restrictions, petty altercations and needless deceptions. Her fine brows drew themselves level. The life she had been leading for the past five months had taught her the iniquity of such a training as hers had been; had shown her the folly of ignorance, the uncleanness of concealment. In those months she had learned that life is to the free, and to those who have courage to face its realities. The murky garment of secrecy had fallen from her and lay behind her in an ignominious heap, the soiled and tumbled creases of which she regarded with abhorrence.

It had amused Swaine in the first days of their intimacy to relate items of smoking-room gossip or racy anecdotes, partly on account of his own full-blooded appreciation of such matters, and partly for the sake of the entertainment he hoped to derive from watching her embarrassed reception of them. He soon ceased to find this an amusing occupation. Catherine listened to everything with the interest of one who desires acquaintance with life in all its aspects, and to his enquiry, "Well, why don't you laugh?" following on his recital of a certain highly doubtful if humorous anecdote, he had received the unexpected answer, "Because I am so interested in the workings of your mind"; the obvious sincerity of which so disconcerted him that he was in no hurry to repeat the experiment. He was obliged to admit, however, that Catherine showed none of the prig-

gishness that might have been expected from her upbringing. She questioned him frankly on all subjects with which she felt she ought to become acquainted, and he even found himself relating certain personal experiences of his own with freedom and with a confidence in her reasonableness that was surprising to himself.

Once, at the close of one of these reminiscences, Catherine, after a moment's silence, had burst forth into a diatribe on the iniquity of the system on which girls in general were educated, and that of her own case in particular, and had spoken in such terms of her mother's outlook on life as had amazed Norman at the extent of passion of which she was capable. "By Jove, Kitty," he had ejaculated, "you can let fly! I never knew you had so much kick in you! I like you when you're angry," he had added admiringly. "A little more animation wouldn't hurt you at times." A comment which had checked Catherine's outburst more effectually than any argument could have done. Indeed, she soon gave up looking to him for subtleties of understanding: she realized that his affair was with life and reality, and that his appreciation of feelings and motives as demonstrated on the stage was part of the actor's stock in trade and no concern of the daily life of the man. This fact had been fully revealed to her on the one occasion upon which she had been betrayed into speaking to him of her father.

It was on New Year's Day, and Swaine had

gone out directly after their early coffee and returned with a great bowl of Roman hyacinths. He had entered her dressing-room and set them before her on the dressing-table. Taken completely unawares, the sight of the delicate pure blossoms and their sudden enveloping fragrance had carried her back in a rush of imagination to the hall in the house at Mortham, the closed blinds, the weeping servants, the sound of scraping feet.

To Swaine's amazement, she burst into tears. "O," she sobbed, "my father! He loved them so—I——" She stopped, for in the glass before her she caught the reflection of Norman's face, and saw it changed from pleased expectation to something bordering on contempt. "Nonsense, Kitty," he had said. "You cannot be able to remember your father. Your mother told me you were a mere child when he died."

And as Catherine, struck into dumbness, stared stupidly at his reflection through her tears, he had turned and abruptly left the room.

She had sat on, very quiet and shivering a little, till, putting out her hand to push away the bowl of flowers, she had touched a little packet tied to one of their stems, and, opening it, had found within a string of fine pearls.

Half an hour later she had descended to the lounge, where Norman was writing letters, the pearls round her throat and all traces of tears carefully removed from her eyes. And she had offered her hand and thanked him with a whole-

hearted acknowledgment of his generosity that restored in an instant all his good-humour.

He had never thought of the incident again; nor, indeed, had Catherine, for it was not one upon which she would allow herself to dwell. Only when, in a week or so, the hyacinths had faded, she had put the bowl outside her window that the sun might ripen the bulbs, and eventually had garnered them up, saying to herself, "Some day, perhaps, I will plant them on his grave."

CHAPTER II

ROULETTE

ON the way for their drive that afternoon Catherine requested that they should call at the French library to exchange some books. There was a certain firmness in her voice in making this request, and a tone could be detected in Norman's reply that, in a less attractive man, would have suggested the epithet "sulky."

Norman had, in fact, little sympathy with these excursions after printed matter, and had only yielded to Catherine's joining the library under compulsion. For Catherine had been quite firm.

"I want to get a working acquaintance with French literature, Norman," she had said gravely; "and I shall never again have so good an opportunity." Norman did not see the necessity—and said so. Catherine replied that it was merely a matter of taste, that it pleased and amused her to know French well, and that she hoped to indulge the taste. She had looked very straight at Swaine as she said this, and for the first time she had caught a reddish gleam in his black eyes. "How if I refuse?" he had asked shortly. Catherine did not shrink. "I have a few trinkets of my own," she replied; "I will sell them."

Swaine laughed. "You are defiant, Miss Catherine?"

"Not so, I am merely resolved. You would not wish to make me into a doormat, Norman."

"It would be a hard choice between a doormat and a blue-stockings."

Catherine shrugged her shoulders. "I think it would," she answered. "I am in no danger of becoming either." Then, after a pause, "Come, Norman," she said. "I promise you that no time of mine shall be spent on reading that you can justly lay claim to. I have never yet asked you for a gift. I can pay for the library subscription, but I would prefer that it should be a present to me from you. Will you not give it me?"

Swaine took several louis from his pocket. "Do you think I care for the money?" he asked roughly, and tossed them on to the table.

"No," answered Catherine quietly; "I know very well that you do not." She took up one of the coins, put it in her purse, and made a neat little pile of the others which she placed by Norman's hand. "One louis will be more than enough," she said; "I am grateful to you, and I will join the library to-day."

This altercation had taken place some three months previously, and Norman, though he had made no further opposition, still sulked a little over their frequent calls at the place.

This afternoon, on returning to the car with her books, she found him engaged in the perusal of a note that had just been put into his hand

by a passing acquaintance. It was from the secretary of the English Dramatic Club, of which he was a member, asking him to give a recitation there one evening during the following week. Norman tossed the note onto Catherine's lap as the car started, and remarked that he should refuse. "I have given them all my best pieces," he said, "and I don't want to do an old one."

Catherine read the letter and folded it thoughtfully. "Norman," she said suddenly, "I wish you'd let me write you something."

Norman stared. "You!" he said.

"Yes. I don't know enough stage-craft to write a play, but I could do a monologue all right, I think. I used to try them at home. They only need a concise plot—a jerky style does very well for them."

Swaine raised his dark brows. "It sounds a big 'only,'" he remarked musedly.

"Well," replied Catherine, "there's one I thought of at home, for instance. It is a story of jealousy. I could write it in a couple of days if I could find a setting."

Norman considered. "Well, Kitty," he said, "of course you could try." He looked at her curiously, and then glanced at the pile of books she had deposited on the seat in front of them.

"Martin said you ought to write," he remarked. "I suppose that's why you are always hunting after books. I wish you would write a duologue."

Edna Carlton is bothering me to do one with her, and though she's a bit of a goose she can act all right."

Catherine smiled. "Edna Carlton would probably choke if she had to repeat my words," she remarked.

Their eyes met and Norman bit his lip. "Do you mean——"

"I mean it really would be rather hard on her to have to make love to you in lines written by myself."

They were passing Eze, and Catherine turned her head as she spoke to look up at the queer crooked habitations perched upon the precipitous rock.

"How long have you known about Edna Carlton, Kitty?"

She bent her gaze on him again. "O, since the last performance but one at the Club. Why, Norman?"

Swaine appeared rather piqued. "She's keen on me," he asserted; "aren't you the least bit jealous?"

"No," Catherine laughed softly. "I don't think so. Perhaps I should be if it was you who were in love with her," she added thoughtfully. "Perhaps."

"You don't seem very sure, Kitty—and how do you know I'm not?"

"Because when I came round to the back after the show that evening you were talking to her in the wings, but you saw me directly I

appeared, and you no longer looked at her but at me."

Norman laughed, not ill-pleased. "You are pretty observant," he said.

Catherine shrugged her shoulders. "I should be a fool if I couldn't see that," she said carelessly. "And I don't yet know whether I should be jealous or not, till I've been tried."

Swaine's curiosity was aroused. "What would you do if I fell in love with the Carlton girl?" he enquired.

"That depends upon whether or not I am myself in love with you."

"Lord, Kitty, you're nothing if not frank! Don't you know whether you're in love with me or not yet?"

"No," said Catherine thoughtfully, "I can't say I do. It is a question I have often asked myself"; and she added, after a moment's pause, "I certainly like you in many ways."

"Thank you so much," said Norman rather tartly. "In what particular do I please you so well?"

Catherine let her eyes rest on him, a little smile at the corners of her mouth. "You are, as you know, very handsome," she said, "and ever so generous; and—O well, you are so 'alive'!"

"If that's all you feel about it, I should like to know what you are doing spending a winter in the South of France with me."

"Seeing life," said Catherine.

"I suppose," said Norman in combative tones,

"you know that there are a good many women who would give something to take your place?"

"Perfectly," said Catherine, laughing. "I meet them daily in the street! But at present you prefer my humble self!"

Swaine suddenly joined her laughter. "I can't quarrel with you, Kits," he said, "you are too truthful! Let's have dinner at Monte and 'see life' at the rooms to-night."

Catherine looked down at her grey silk dress and touched a cerise rose she wore at her waist. "Will my frock do for that?" she asked doubtfully.

Norman ran his eye over it critically. "Yes," he said, "but I'm never quite sure of that hat with it. Let us go and see if we can find one here. A big black one, I think I should prefer."

When they entered the *salle de jeu* that evening there were many who turned their heads to look after them, for the social etiquette of France, punctilious as it is in some matters, by no means precludes the stare direct; and Norman had added to his purchase of the wide-brimmed hat a cerise velvet cloak, the heavy folds of which fell closely along Catherine's slender figure.

He thought she would feel the cold going back late in the car, he said, and was with difficulty dissuaded from adding a set of blue-fox furs by Catherine's insisting that she had already furs enough.

Swaine was in a mood for excitement, and pushed

close to one of the roulette tables beside a slim woman whose black gown was fastened at the neck by a diamond crescent, and whose long rope of pearls swept the shoulder of the man seated in front of her pricking diligently at his card, as she leaned forward to put her stake. Catherine, withdrawn a little to one side, noticed that the woman was apparently alone, a breach of French etiquette, of course, and that as Swaine pressed up beside her she threw him a quick flashing glance and then bent to her play again. Catherine moved round the table to watch the play of a man whose little heap of gold and silver coin appeared to increase with interesting rapidity, and then fell to noticing the faces round her. The rooms at Monte always filled her with interest : their sombre decoration and studied decorum made such an effective background for the jewels of the women, the watchful-eyed players and stolid croupiers. She liked to listen to the nonchalant "*À vos jeux, messieurs,*" the light clatter of the falling ball, the swish of the rake on the baize, the chink of coin. They made up a sort of parable of life, she thought, from the croupier's invocation to the final cry of the winning stakes.

A man before her threw a louis on *passee*, another, half rising, and using his miniature rake, pushed a series of five-franc pieces on to certain points round a number with scientific exactness : a third passed a thousand-franc note with "*De la monnaie, s'il vous plaît,*" and a quick patter of louis fell on the baize, followed by the slither of a pile of silver

as it was propelled by the banker's rake. "*Le jeu est fait,*" announced the croupier. "*Rien ne va plus!*" For a moment or two there was no sound but the murmur from the other tables and the whirl of the spinning ball, till with a slackening whirl it clattered lightly into a groove. Then the call of the winning number, colour and division; the deft sweep of the rake, the soft flopping fall of pieces, and "*A vos jeux, messieurs. Faites vos jeux.*"

Catherine thought she should like to stake. She looked across to Swaine. The lady in black with the diamonds was speaking to him, with a side-long upward glance in which admiration contended with cupidity. Swaine's dark head was bent to listen, his black eyes scanned her well-achieved complexion, his hand touched her bare ringed one as he took her stake to place it for her.

Catherine saw that the woman sidled nearer, and as the ball rolled again, touched his arm in simulated trepidation. She checked her intention of going round to him and stood watching the pair. Swaine was winning—he was invariably lucky at the tables. The woman, on the other hand, spread her hands with assumed desolation over her lost stake. Swaine took a few louis from the pile in front of him, spoke a word to his neighbour and, disregarding her well-acted protest, placed the coins for her. The ball rolled and fell once more, the woman scooped in her winnings and the comedy was repeated.

Suddenly Catherine became interested in her own sensations.

Here, she discovered, was a chance for her to feel jealousy! She wondered what she did feel. She looked again at Swaine's fine shoulders towering over the undersized Frenchman in front of him, and then round the tables. She did not see a man in the room who could compare with him physically; and she was, she admitted to herself, distinctly proud of the fact. She glanced again at the Frenchwoman, who had for the moment forgotten her part and was following Swaine's movements, as he placed his own stake, with greedy eyes. "I don't care for Norman any more than she does—not really," was the thought that rose in Catherine's mind. "I too am only playing for the stakes!"

"*Rien ne va plus*," chanted the croupier, and suddenly she turned and made her way to Swaine's side as the ball fell and, amid a little murmur from the lookers-on, Norman received a stiff roulcau of gold, pushed at the end of the rake. He took it up, and turning to speak again to the Frenchwoman, who was eyeing it eagerly, he caught sight of Catherine over her shoulder. She was smiling at him, and her fresh young face, flushed by the heat of the room to a colour that harmonized with the cerise of her velvet-covered shoulders, was very charming. Swaine deliberately looked back at the enamelled cheeks of the woman by his side. The corners of his mouth turned down, he smiled insolently in the woman's face, and then

deliberately handed the little roll of coin across her half-lifted hand to Catherine. "Come along, Kitty," said he, "I've had enough of this." He turned aside from the table as he spoke and the two made their way slowly down the room.

The Frenchwoman bent and said some low quick words to the man seated in front of her, with whom she had not hitherto appeared to be acquainted; and Catherine, glancing back, saw the pair regarding them, the man spitefully, the woman with baffled angry eyes.

An hour later, as they drove towards Nice under the silver of a Southern moon, Catherine, who had been unusually silent, suddenly turned to Swaine.

"Norman," she said, "you have been very good to me. You know I am not sentimental, but—I think I should like to know that you feel I have been worth it."

Swaine looked at her fine face, its clearly cut features pale in the moonlight, and a gleam shot up into his black eyes.

He took hold of a long lock of hair that had escaped from under the broad-brimmed hat and pulled it gently. "I should rather think I do, Kitty!" he said.

CHAPTER III

CHARTREUSE

CATHERINE'S monologue was finished before the end of the week, and, to her great pleasure, Norman found it worth learning and gave up two entire mornings to the study of it. He acted it for her on the afternoon of the second, and Catherine was amazed at his performance. The sketch, a slight enough affair, was the tale of a jealous lover, and had now been given for a setting the *salle de jeu* at Monte Carlo.

Swaine appeared to wrap himself in the character as with a garment, so that Catherine, listening, marvelled at the talent that could so reproduce a passion its exponent was incapable of himself experiencing. "For I think you would never suffer jealousy like that, Norman," she said, "and how, I wonder, can a man reproduce that which he does not feel?"

Norman laughed. "You are yourself in the same category, Kitty," he said, "for you wrote it, and I don't suppose you have ever caught your wife making love to another man, have you!"

He ran through the monologue again, altering a phrase here and a gesture there as he went

along. "And we must borrow a roulette board," he added. "The piece requires that the sounds of the game should be made behind the scene. The audience should hear the ball rolling and the stakes called. And if I were you, Kitty, I should let the whole thing end with the croupier's '*Rien ne va plus*' spoken 'off.' It would be very effective. I'll get one of the members to lend us a roulette wheel. Gregson has one, I believe; you and he could work it in the wings."

Catherine assented readily, and on the night of the performance at the Club they carried the plan into effect, Catherine managing the wheel while Gregson gave the subdued calls of the croupier.

The monologue was a success. There was a crowded audience, for Swaine was in great repute as an actor throughout English-speaking Nice, and at the close of the piece he received much applause and came hastily to the wings to lead Catherine forward as its authoress. It was when they were again leaving the stage that Catherine, with her hand still in Swaine's, met the eyes of Edna Carlton, who was waiting to go on in her turn.

The look on the girl's pretty face startled her, for she felt at once that the sentiment it expressed was one of violent antagonism. She loosed Norman's hand that he might return to the front, and drew a little apart from the group in the wings as Swaine, in response to a determined encore, seated himself at the piano and began

to sing. The song was the one from the "Cycle of Life," the first song that Catherine had ever heard him sing, and as it progressed she seemed to find herself back in the Conways' little drawing-room at West Kensington—to see her mother's black-and-white figure, Lily Kellaway, Jim—"I wish I knew that he is happy," she thought, and unaccustomed tears came to her eyes. "Now that I have you and hold you," Swaine's voice rose triumphantly on the words: and suddenly from behind Catherine came a girl's figure, that of Edna Carlton. She moved forward like a person in a dream and stood still, her hands clenched at her side and all her soul in her eyes. "It is summer—it is summer!" sang Norman in exultation, and Catherine stared at the girl, fascinated by her intensity of feeling. She remembered how the song had shaken her own being when first she had heard Swaine sing it. "Come let us live!" Edna Carlton's hands had raised themselves, clasping one another, and she remained with her eyes fixed on the singer until the rushing chords had vibrated into a storm of applause.

Swaine came off the stage—he was pushing his black hair back over his head and remarked to Gregson that it was warm.

Coming face to face with Edna Carlton, he stopped. Catherine, a little withdrawn into the shadow, saw him give the girl a responsive look. It was not in Swaine's power to withhold response to admiration. His lips moved in speech, and though the girl made no answer she gazed in an

intense appeal into his black eyes. Gregson had gone to the piano and was striking up a popular song. Swaine held out his hand to Edna Carlton and she put hers into it. Then, glancing round, he caught sight of Catherine, and his expression underwent a subtle change. He dropped the hand he held and moved at once to her side. "Shall we go to the front now, Kitty?" he said. "I asked Porter to keep two seats for us."

In spite of herself Catherine's gaze was drawn to Edna Carlton. The girl turned her face quickly away; but not before Catherine had caught again the gleam of jealousy and hatred in her eyes.

"Norman," said Catherine as, late that night, they sat in the hotel lounge over cigarettes and liqueurs, "I wish I knew what has become of Jim Conway."

Swaine looked up from his chartreuse, into which he had been thoughtfully gazing. "Jim Conway," he repeated in surprise; "he went out to Queensland again, didn't he? Rotten pitch it is, too."

Catherine looked up. "Have you been out there, then?" she asked.

"O yes, ages ago, on tour. That's where I first met Conway, you know," replied Norman carelessly.

A recollection of her mother's words, "Someone who has been out there and knows his wife," came back to Catherine. "Then it was you, I

suppose, who told my mother that he was married," she said.

" Married ? What, out in Australia ? No. He's not married that I know of."

A puzzled look came into Catherine's eyes. " What was it you did tell her, Norman ? "

Swaine put his lips to the tiny glass. " How should I know ? " he asked rather impatiently. " Some bit of ranch gossip, I suppose. Why all this sudden interest in Conway ? "

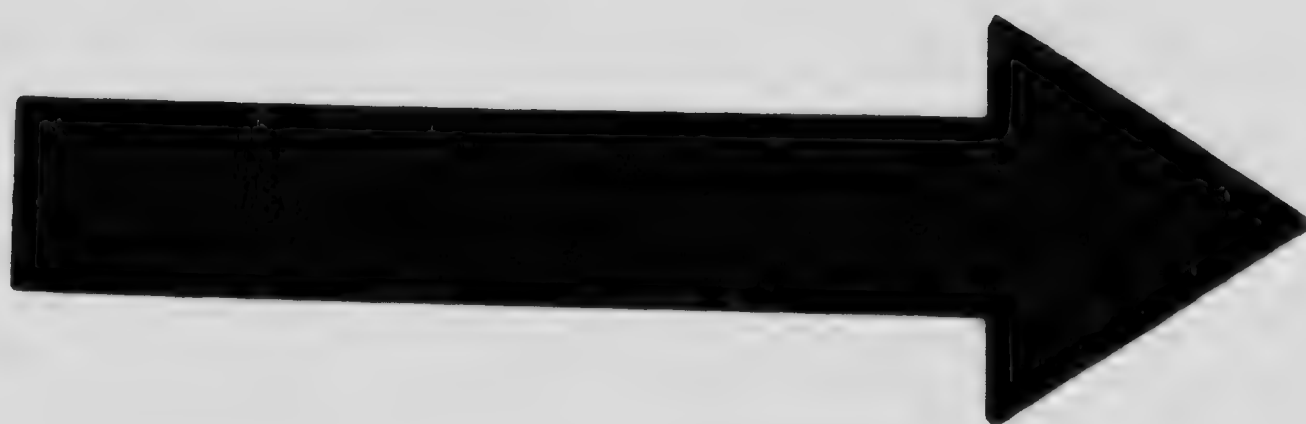
Catherine leaned back in her chair and smoothed the long gloves lying across her lap. " Your song reminded me of him," she said. " He was my friend "; and added, as she met Swaine's eye, " but I know you don't believe in friendship between men and women."

" No," said Swaine; " not unless the woman is plain and the man decrepit."

Catherine laughed. " Am I plain ? And Jim could hardly have been described as decrepit, at thirty-five or thereabouts ! Yet," she repeated dreamily, " he was my friend."

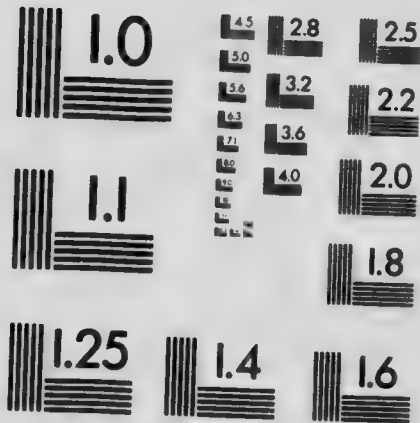
Norman swallowed the last drop of chartreuse. " Poof, my dear girl ! Conway was in love with you right enough," he said ; " anyone could have seen that. As for your mother, she was afraid of her life you would marry him. Mrs. Conway told me so. She probably wishes you had now," added Norman cynically.

He rose and stretched himself. " I'm going off to bed," he remarked. " That Club was soundly hot and I'm tired."



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He went upstairs and Catherine sat on alone. The lounge was empty, save for two people who were drinking coffee at a little table near the farther end and a waiter who carried on a conversation with the hall-porter in low voluble French. The lights were not all switched on and the wide space seemed full of shadows.

She saw now the fact and purpose of her mother's lie. She had feared to lose her daughter by a marriage with the man who had been merely a friend.

Catherine laughed suddenly, a little mirthless laugh. That her mother should have taken so much trouble to lie and slander in order, as it turned out, to throw her daughter into the arms of Norman Swaine was indeed a comedy. She was, Catherine thought, as incapable of understanding a friendship between a man and woman as Swaine was. Shallow natures were always so; only the gross facts of life appeared over their limited horizon.

That Swaine should fail to understand was natural. He was himself so personally attractive, and made so powerful an appeal to the women who came into contact with him through this and the virility of his temperament. She had herself felt, and still continued to feel, the compelling force of his personality to no little extent. Her thoughts wandered to the Carlton girl, with a sense of trouble brewing. This girl was certainly in love with Swaine; it was plainly expressed in her bearing, and had been for some time past.

And Catherine asked herself, not without uneasiness, how the affair would end. That Swaine was, in as far as he was capable of affection, attached to herself she knew. But would this affection stand the test of a siege laid to his favour by Miss Carlton? Catherine was definitely of opinion that it would not do so. She felt, too, that her own course would be difficult. She would at a certain stage in the affair have to make an appeal to Swaine for frank dealing—an appeal which would inevitably be interpreted by him as having its foundation in jealousy. She sighed a little, and her thoughts ran on to the time, perhaps not remotely distant, when Swaine and herself should part. She wished she had a small income of her own upon which to live until she should find congenial work in the world.

The couple at the farther end of the lounge had paid their reckoning and left. The porter switched off the light, leaving that part of the place in deep shadow. It seemed to Catherine, seated motionless and gazing into vacancy, that Jim's tired face emerged from the shadows and his eyes rested on her. Norman had said that he had been in love with her. Surely not. Otherwise, would he not have taken her with him? But the tale about his marriage was untrue. After all, he had been keeping nothing from her. He was again the old frank, mocking Jim she had known and loved, and he had always been so. It was she who had been deceived and lied to—

as ever, Catherine added bitterly to herself—as ever.

She moved restlessly and dismissed her mother's part in the affair from her mind. She would give it no further thought, for she knew very well that despite the fact that she had won her fight, the old bitterness was hot in her heart still. She pushed it impatiently away out of sight. Her problem was no longer with her mother's flimsy deceptions: it was with life and the realities of the world.

The tired waiter advanced to take up the tray. Catherine rose and spoke to the man, remarking upon the lateness of the hour and giving him some money. He thanked her, and wishing her a polite good-night, took up the tray and went slowly away down the hall, switching off the electric lights one after another as he went.

Half-way upstairs Catherine paused and glanced backward over her shoulder into the darkened hall. "Jim," she whispered softly to herself, "you have come back to me to-night, out of the shadows. Dear old Jim!"

CHAPTER IV

EDNA CARLTON

THE writing of the monologue was to prove a more important event than Catherine had anticipated when she had so diffidently proposed to Swaine that she should endeavour to provide him with one.

For he afterwards suggested that it should be submitted to a London theatrical publisher, and as he himself wrote to the firm saying that he had acted it with success, it was immediately accepted by them for publication, with at the same time an intimation that they would be glad to see more of Miss Arlsea's manuscript.

Thus encouraged, Catherine eagerly resumed her former attempt at literary work: for she was quick to realize that here, perhaps, lay the solution of future problems. The slight plots necessary for short theatrical pieces seemed to come easily to her, and it remained only to acquire the technique of writing and stagecraft. The former she now set herself to master and Swaine willingly undertook to instruct her in the latter.

It was characteristic of him that as soon as he found her literary bent likely to result in any practical achievement, he withdrew his former opposition to her bookish proclivities and offered her

all the assistance that from his extensive acquaintance with the stage he was so well qualified to give.

The weeks that followed the acceptance of this, her first manuscript, were very full of happiness for Catherine. All her interest in literary effort, which had lain dormant during the past months, began to revive. She realized with contentment that Swaine, whose love of his profession was one of his most genuine characteristics, was finding fresh zest in their connection now that he could begin to teach her something new and in which he found her so apt a pupil. Catherine almost forgot Edna Carlton, or at any rate ceased for a time to regard her with any serious degree of apprehension.

One day, however, about three weeks after the performance at the Club, Swaine came into the room where Catherine was correcting some typewritten sheets, and hoisting himself on to the table at which she was working, sat swinging his legs and smoking in silence. Presently Catherine enquired as to the result of a Club meeting which he had attended that morning. Swaine, having replied shortly, relapsed into silence again: and seeing that he was out of humour, she resumed her writing and waited for him to speak.

"They want you to write a playlet for the next performance at the Club, Kitty," he said abruptly.

Catherine looked up. "Do they?" she asked in pleased tones; "I wonder if I could."

"Yes, of course you could. That little thing of yours 'The Velvet Glove' will do very well

with a bit of alteration. I don't know where we shall get an actress for the girl's part, though," he added.

"Miss Carlton, of course."

Norman's mouth set grimly. "Miss Edna Carlton will have nothing to do with any further performances if I am included in the cast," he said.

Catherine laid down her pen and regarded him. His face wore a dogged look that it usually took on when he was annoyed, and the red tinge had come into his eyes. She waited to hear more.

Norman puffed hard at his cigarette for a few moments. Then he took it from between his lips and jerked it into a pen-tray standing upon the table.

"That girl's lost her head," he said suddenly. "It's all very well up to a certain point; but when it comes to waylaying a chap and barging at him in the street, I'm off."

"What has happened, Norman?" asked Catherine quietly. "May I know?"

"O yes, I don't mind telling you, Kitty, you've got a head on you. The Carlton girl's been making a dead set at me for some time, as you know, and—O, well—I've taken her out to tea once or twice——"

"Well," said Catherine quietly; "go on."

Norman shot a glance at her and continued, apparently more at ease: "There's been nothing further in the affair, as far as I am concerned; but to-day, because I suggested down at the Club that she and I should do a duologue of yours,

she made an ass of herself before the entire committee, and, not content with that, she waited for me to come out afterwards and let fly in the street. Nothing I could say made any difference. She accused me of leading her on—making her believe I was in love with her.

"I told her pretty plainly what I thought of her behaviour," added Norman, "and when she started dragging your name about the public street I'd had enough of it. I called a taxi at last and fairly pushed her into it; otherwise I expect she'd be talking now!" He paused and kicked at the leg of the table with his heel.

Catherine played with her pen in silence. She was guiltily conscious of a secret sense of elation. "So ends the Edna Carlton episode" was her not unnatural reflection. Norman's next words dispelled the illusion.

"I shouldn't be surprised if you hear more of it, Kitty," he said. "'A woman scorned,' you know. And I am afraid she is even more angry with you than with me."

"I don't see what harm she can do me," Catherine said slowly.

Norman shrugged his shoulders. "She's one of the empty-headed kind," he said, "who, when they consider themselves wronged, will stop at nothing. I know them."

Catherine made a wry face. "Yes," she said, "I suppose you do!"

"Look here, Kitty," Swaine burst out suddenly; "I give you my word there's been nothing between

me and the girl but a little mild flirtation. You said yourself she was keen on me, and you can't expect——"

"I expect nothing," interrupted Catherine, "except frankness."

She laid a hand on Swaine's sleeve and raised her deep eyes to his face as he sat above her. "You know, Norman, that I'm not unreasonable," she said. "I have learned a lot of things since we've been together, and one of them is the futility of trying to coerce affection. I should never attempt to keep you for an hour, once you were weary of me. No——" as Swaine was about to protest. "It is best that we understand one another. I owe you almost everything. Money, dress and luxury, of course—that goes without saying; but I am indebted to you for much more than these, for you have taught me to live. Now I will ask one thing more of you. When you are weary of my companionship, tell me so and let me go. You know me quite well enough to understand that not only will I avoid a fuss, but I will gratefully rest your debtor for everything."

Swaine wriggled uncomfortably. "But, my dear girl, I am not weary of your companionship," he expostulated, "so why this harangue?"

Catherine smiled. "This harangue because I want your confidence."

Norman drew his arm from under her hand and took out his cigarette-case. "You have it," he answered. "I have spoken the truth to you

about this wretched girl: just as I should have done had you been a man."

"Very well," said Catherine. "Then I need not fear her. So long as you are hiding nothing from me, I can face her anger with unconcern." She put away her writing materials and rose. "Now shall we go out for a run in the car?" she asked. "You have not forgotten it is the first day of the tennis tournament at Monte, have you? I rather think I should like to run over and see them start. I'll change my frock first," she added.

Norman got down from his perch and followed her across the room. An unwonted sense of gratitude possessed him. He knew that Catherine was behaving well, and was conscious of a pleased realization that when the time came for them to part there would be, as he phrased it to himself, "none of the usual hysterics." He approached her as she was in the act of taking a gown out of the wardrobe. "You are a brick, Kitty," he said. "The best sort I've ever come across." He touched her hair lightly with his fingers. "You shall have that blue-fox set you admired the other day at Victoire's," he said.

Catherine, with a heap of embroidered muslin in her hands, turned to him with a humorous lift of her brows. "Nonsense, Norman," she said, laughing; "you are not turning sentimental surely! And it's getting too warm for furs. Tell me, what hat shall I wear with this white dress?"

CHAPTER V

A LANDED FISH

THE tennis at Monte Carlo that afternoon was not a very exhilarating spectacle. Most of the players to be worked off before the finals, which were to take place at the end of the week, were French, and though France has produced fine players, yet sport is not her strong point as a nation, so that the exhibition of form given that afternoon was more a subject for amusement than edification.

Norman was in high spirits and more than usually attentive to Catherine, who looked very attractive in her white embroidered muslin.

They wandered about the outskirts of the well-kept courts, laughed at the tennis, admired the frocks, and partook of what the French are pleased to call tea—or rather Catherine did so, for Norman preferred *café* and liked it *en verre*—a vulgar taste, as Catherine laughingly reminded him.

Presently he left her seated under the shade of a eucalyptus and went in search of a cocktail, and it was some twenty minutes before he returned in a state of mild excitement. "Who do you think I've just seen, Kitty?" he asked, as he drew near to her. "You'd never guess!"

Catherine, awakened from a reverie, checked an absurd inclination to answer "Edna Carlton," and said she didn't know.

"Herbert Carr and Lily—married, I suppose. They must be here on their honeymoon. Carr is as flourishing as ever and Lily is got up in the pink of fashion. They are over there by the entrance: shall we go and speak to them?"

Catherine hesitated. She was conscious of a strong disinclination to meet Lily, who was too reminiscent of her own unhappy past to be anything but distasteful to her; on the other hand, they would have to meet sooner or later if the Carrs were staying here; for Monte was small, if expensive. She assented at last, and Norman, to whom the idea of introducing a new Catherine of his own creation appealed vastly, piloted her round the courts to where Carr and his bride were seated watching a game.

Catherine saw a large man, past his first youth, with a good-humoured but sensible face and the assured bearing that wealth is able to confer. He was leaning on the back of his wife's chair and discoursing of tennis to her inattentive ear. Lily looked older, Catherine thought, and then decided that this appearance was due to the fact that her eyebrows and lashes were now black, whereas before they had been flaxen, and to the very fashionable cut of her green-silk gown.

Swaine advanced to Lily and raised his hat. "Mrs. Carr, I believe?" he said.

Lily sprang to her feet. "Norman Swaine, as

I live! And Kitty—my dear Kitty——” she stopped suddenly. “How you’ve changed!” she said.

Swaine had turned to Carr, reminding him of some former meeting, and then introduced Catherine, and the four stood talking together rather constrainedly.

Lily was the first to regain her old confidence.

“Fancy meeting you the second day we are here,” she said; “are you staying in Monte?”

Catherine explained, and Lily, with a critical eye on her embroideries, vouchsafed the information that Carr and she were, as Swaine had conjectured, on their honeymoon; had motored south from Calais—“and a bit of a frost it’s been, literally,” added Lily. “We had snow at Amiens.”

Catherine made some trivial reply. There was a pause. Lily was burning to ask questions, but something in Catherine’s manner restrained her. The latter, finding the silence awkward, turned to Carr with a remark about the tennis. Carr, who had been regarding her rather diffidently, brightened up and responded with a show of genuine interest in the game. Presently they moved off together to watch a match just started on one of the further courts, and as Lily had re-seated herself, Swaine took Carr’s vacant chair. He let his eyes wander over Mrs. Carr’s buxom person and decided that by the time she was thirty-five she would be distinctly plain. “How did you do it?” he asked suddenly.

Lily, who had been following Catherine’s whit-

gowned figure with her eyes, turned and regarded him. "Do what?" she asked.

Swaine jerked his head towards Carr's retreating person. "Land him," he said laconically.

"You were always polite, Norman Swaine! Same as one does any other fish, I suppose."

Norman laughed. "But he's a whale," he said; "I should have thought he'd have been too heavy for the tackle!"

Lily eyed him somewhat resentfully. "Anyway, I shouldn't have been fool enough to creep into your lobster-pot," she retorted.

He laughed again. "It wasn't baited for limpets," he remarked.

"More fool Catherine Arlsea to swallow the bait."

"Do you think so?" Norman looked across to where Catherine and Carr had stopped by a court. Carr was explaining something to her and she listened, her finely poised head raised attentively.

"Kitty's done very well on it," he remarked judicially.

Lily followed his gaze. "I must admit the truth of that," she said with a kind of grudging admiration. "I never saw anyone so much altered."

"She pays to dress well," said Swaine complacently.

Lily's lip curled. "You may have provided the garments," she retorted, "but you didn't make that face and figure."

"No. We owe these blessings to Mrs. Arlsea,

I believe," said Swaine drily. "How did she approve of your deep sea fishing, by the way? I fancy she'd an idea of netting the fish in question herself, when I last saw her."

Lily laughed suddenly. "You never saw anyone so let down," she said, turning to him. "I saved up the news of our engagement on purpose till one day when she was calling on Mrs. Conway, and then I sprung it on the two of them. You ought to have seen her. Mrs. Conway tried to carry things off by asking me when we were going to be married and so on, in order, I suppose, to give her time to recover. When she could get her breath she was stupid enough to burst forth into a tirade about girls of the present day and how they hunted after men—the men didn't get a chance, she declared; they got snatched up before they had time to look round. I remarked that Herbert, as far as I knew, had done a good bit of looking round. Whereupon she attacked me for what she was pleased to call my vulgarity. She said it was obvious that I had not had a mother to look after me."

"What did you say to that?" asked Norman, who was being considerably amused.

"I said I had noticed it was a blessing that did not always meet with the appreciation it deserved. And of course she saw what I was driving at and went purple with rage; and then Mrs. Conway intervened and told me to be quiet. I hear Mrs. Arlsea informed Mrs. Wilton that she was sorry for Herbert Carr. and he would

soon find out his mistake"—Lily's laugh had a touch of annoyance. "How did you know we were married?" she added.

"I didn't. Martin said you were engaged; but that's a month or six weeks ago."

"Martin!" said Lily with sudden interest. "Do you correspond with him?"

"Yes. He forwards my letters from the flat."

Lily looked across at Catherine, who was laughing at some remark of Carr's. "Does Martin know?" she asked.

"That Kitty is here with me? O yes. Kitty hears from the sister sometimes."

Lily turned again and regarded Swaine with a quizzical expression in her eyes. "It never struck you, I suppose, that he might be keen on Catherine himself?"

Norman stared. "Who, Martin? Why, he's scarcely seen her."

"O yes, he has. I rather thought he was taken with her that afternoon at the flat."

"The day you smashed the crockery?"

Lily laughed. "Exactly," she said. "He looked at her a great deal, I thought. And you remember the night we all went to see you act? Well, I watched him that evening just to find out if I were right. He didn't see much of the play."

Swaine appeared unconvinced. "You girls are always sniffing after a romance," he remarked.

"Yes," said Lily, "when it comes our own way. But we are not apt to be mistaken when it is a case of one of our friends."

Swaine shrugged his shoulders. "You may be right," he replied carelessly. "It doesn't much matter—now."

"Now that I broke that china for nothing, eh!"

"Just so. You're an expensive guest, Mrs. Carr!"

Lily's laugh was not without malice. "Kitty Arlsea has cost you more than the price of a tea-set, Mr. Swaine," she said.

Swaine looked again at Catherine, for whom Carr had found a chair. She was leaning back with her face upturned to speak to him, and the sunlight shone full upon her and touched her brown hair to bronze. "She's worth every penny of it," he said with unwonted enthusiasm. "Let's go over and join them: have you had tea?"

"I like Mr. Carr, Norman," said Catherine, as they drove home.

"So it seems," replied Norman banteringly. "I begin to wonder if it isn't my turn to be jealous!"

Catherine smiled and then grew thoughtful. "He is not at all what I expected," she said; "I pictured him vulgar as well as rich, but he is sensible, and I should say of sound practical intelligence."

They were passing Villefranche, and she looked thoughtfully out over the harbour. The sun was setting and the masts and cordage of the shipping rose black against the gilded waters of the Mediterranean. A couple of French torpedo-boats lay

at anchor in the harbour, and Catherine could see the little red knobs on the caps of the sailors bobbing about the decks.

"I'm glad he married Lily and not——" she stopped suddenly, flushing a little.

Swaine regarded her with a smile at the corner of his mouth.

"Best of a bad bargain, eh?" he said teasingly. Then, as she made no reply, he dismissed the subject with "Carr's well enough. He doesn't know how to get value for his money, though. Shall we stop at the theatre and book seats for 'Mignon,' Kitty? I see it's on next week."

"That's a jolly nice girl, that Miss Arlsea," was Carr's comment spoken to his wife as they were dressing for dinner. "What the deuce did she throw herself away on a rotter like Swaine for?"

"Fed up at home," said Lily tersely, "and no wonder, with that mother of hers. Norman Swaine has his attractions, too, you know," she added judicially.

Carr grunted. "Regular swank-pot," he said. "It's astonishing how women always manage to get taken in."

Lily threw him a meaning glance. "Yes, isn't it," she said.

Carr laughed, gaily enough. "You are properly married, anyway, my dear," he retorted.

"O yes," Lily replied drily; "I took care of that all right."

CHAPTER VI

THE SILVER BAG

ONE afternoon a day or two later, when a waiter entering Mrs. Swaine's sitting-room announced that an English lady wished to see her, Catherine naturally supposed the lady in question to be Lily, and told the man to bring her up.

On his return she laid aside her book, and was coming quickly forward when she suddenly checked herself and stood still in the centre of the room. The lady who followed the waiter was not Mrs. Carr, but Miss Edna Carlton.

The two women stood regarding one another whilst the man left the room. Catherine saw a slight fair girl, dressed in a very tight-fitting navy-blue walking costume and wearing an emerald-green toque and emerald ear-rings. She held herself erect and swung a silver chain-bag in one hand. Her face was paler than formerly, and there was defiance in her eyes.

At the sound of the closing door Catherine moved a step forward and spoke.

"I think you may have asked for Mr. Swaine," she said.

"No," replied Miss Carlton; "I asked for you, Miss Arlsea."

There was an emphasis on the last words that could hardly be ignored.

Catherine bowed. "That is my name," she replied. "Will you be seated?"

The other did not reply. She moved to a table that stood near and rested her left hand upon it, while she continued to swing the silver bag in her right.

Catherine stood regarding her for a moment: then she turned a little away, and seating herself on a high-backed chair near the window, waited for her visitor to speak.

Edna Carlton came straight to the point. "I have come to ask you something," she said. "Do you know that for the past six weeks or so Norman Swaine has been making love to me?"

She jerked her head defiantly backwards, keeping her eyes on Catherine's face.

The latter returned her gaze with a little smile. "'Making love' is rather an indefinite term, Miss Carlton, is it not?"

"I am ready to be quite definite."

Catherine raised her shoulders. "Doubtless," she replied, "otherwise you would hardly be here."

Miss Carlton's eyes glinted. "I can bring friends of my own," she went on, "to prove to you that Norman Swaine has been paying me marked attentions for weeks past."

Catherine's smile deepened. "I will take your word for it," she said.

"Do you pretend to me that the fact is known to you?"

After a moment's consideration Catherine replied, "I at any rate knew that you were interested in him."

"That is, of course, how Mr. Swaine would naturally put it to you. I have come here to let you know that it is he who is responsible for the affair."

"What affair, Miss Carlton?"

"That which you are pleased to describe as my interest in him."

Catherine's laugh sounded perfectly sincere. "Well, yes," she said, "I quite realize that he is responsible. Women do as a rule find him rather irresistible, I believe."

Edna Carlton reddened as she answered, "You are laughing at me, Catherine Arlsea."

Catherine's smile vanished. "You risked that when you came here, Miss Carlton," she said with sudden sharpness.

"Perhaps you think you can afford to laugh?"

"Perhaps I do."

"There is, however, a proverb about those who laugh last."

"I have heard it."

"Better not be too sure of your present position then. You may find you have been deceived."

Catherine returned the girl's angry gaze steadily. "You mistake the matter, Miss Carlton," she said. "Mr. Swaine will not deceive me."

"Indeed! May I ask why you are so sure of that?"

"Because there is no need for him to do so."

Into Edna Carlton's eyes crept a flicker of surprise. "I don't understand what you mean," she said.

"No," Catherine said tersely, "I should hardly expect you to do so."

Miss Carlton swung her silver bag on to the table, where it collapsed into a little heap with a clink.

She jerked forward a chair and seated herself upon it.

"Such acting does not take me in at all," she declared. "You will not make me believe that you are aware that Norman Swaine has been taking me about Nice: that we have been seen frequently up at Cimiez together, and at Monte Carlo, and that he gives me presents. Why, it was he who gave me that——" she flicked at the silver bag lying on the table.

Catherine was sitting very still, her eyes on the girl's face.

"I know the main facts you speak of," she said. "I have not concerned myself with details. I am not of a jealous disposition, Miss Carlton."

The other sneered. "Every woman is jealous of her man."

"Of his attentions, perhaps; hardly of those that are shown him."

"I repeat that it is not a question of my preference, it is of his attentions to me that I am speak-

ing." She rose as she spoke and came towards Catherine. "How if I were to tell you that our relations are more definite than you suppose?" she said.

For one second Catherine's faith in Norman's word wavered, then she risked her stake. "It would be throwing away your reputation for nothing. I should not believe you."

The girl stood staring at her for a moment, then she moved abruptly aside and returned to her chair.

A sensation of relief possessed Catherine. She spoke on a sudden impulse. "I have you at a disadvantage, Miss Carlton," she said. "I do not think it is fair to you. Perhaps you will forgive me if I repeat that I know you are attracted to Mr. Swaine—— No, do not try to stop me. I do not say it unkindly. I, on the other hand, came out to Nice with him at his suggestion because my home-life was not very tolerable to me. You look surprised. Perhaps you have never experienced such a life, and therefore you must find it difficult to understand my position. But the intimacy between Mr. Swaine and myself is on a basis of friendship rather than of passion."

The girl's face expressed incredulity. "You expect me to believe that!" she said rudely.

"It is as you see fit, Miss Carlton," Catherine answered. "What you do or do not believe is immaterial to me."

"It would make a pretty tale to tell Norman Swaine—that you do not love him!"

"It is a tale you may tell him at any time, if it amuses you to do so."

"It amuses me that you take me for a simpleton."

"Sometimes it may be possible to be too clever, Miss Carlton. You are now seeking for subterfuge where there is none. Mr. Swaine knows my position in the matter, and realizes that my sentiment towards him is one of friendship rather than love. Should he at any time come to me with a story of a preference for another woman, I am ready to make things easy for him. Why, then, should he have recourse to deceit?"

Edna Carlton broke the silence that followed. She rose from her chair. "I will not pretend to understand your attitude, Miss Arlsea," she said; "I simply cannot do so. To me the woman who will not fight to the last for the favour of a man such as Norman Swaine is a fool."

Catherine smiled. "Let us leave it at that," she answered. "Perhaps you are mistaken in your judgment of me, and my methods may not be so ineffectual as you suppose!"

"I at any rate see that I was mistaken when I came here this afternoon," Edna Carlton said.

She spoke the words slowly and turned to leave the room, but at the door she stopped and looked back.

Catherine was still seated in the same attitude: her fine head tilted against the high-backed chair, her eyes very steady.

A little of the old defiance returned to Edna Carlton's face.

"All the same, I shall win him in the end," she asserted.

Catherine smiled. She raised her hand and pointed to the little heap of silver which still lay on the table. "You have forgotten your bag," she said.

Half an hour later, when Swaine entered the room, he found Catherine in the same attitude, her head turned away against the chair-back to look out of the window. He threw the roll of music he carried on to the table and came towards her. "I don't often see you idling, Kitty," he remarked. "What's up?"

She turned her face towards him. "I was thinking, Norman," she answered, adding quietly, "Miss Carlton has been here."

Swaine's face darkened. "I was afraid of that," he said. "Why did you see her, Kitty?"

Catherine explained. "And I think perhaps it was as well that I should see her," she added, "for now we understand one another—at least, in so far as it is possible for two such different people to do so."

"Which isn't very far," said Swaine with a grimace. "I needn't ask you what she came for. To make mischief, I suppose."

Catherine smiled faintly. "Something of the sort," she replied.

Swaine turned away to the window and stood

leaning back against the wooden shutter, his eyes roving to the gardens of a villa opposite. "I should be glad to know how far she succeeded," he said gruffly.

"Not at all, I believe," was Catherine's reply. "She told me some things in detail which fortunately I had already roughly learned from you, and which, thanks to your candour in having acquainted me with them, I was able to smile at."

Norman looked at her sharply. "That all?" he asked.

"No," replied Catherine slowly. "No, she—well, she seems somewhat careless of her reputation."

Swaine jerked himself erect. "Kitty," he exclaimed, "I swear——"

Catherine raised her hand. "There is no need," she interrupted. "She knows that I disbelieve her."

Swaine leant back again and turned his face to the window. The Southern evening was closing rapidly in. The white-walled villa stood ghostly in the gathering gloom. A tall palm in the centre of the garden stood clear cut against the evening sky. A light appeared inside the house, wavering unsteadily from room to room.

An unusual sensation of diffidence took hold of Swaine. He stretched his hand out to the bolt of the shutter against which he leaned and jerked it to and fro.

All at once Catherine spoke, and her voice was firm.

"I think, Norman," she said, "it is not right that the girl should have been allowed to come here to-day."

Swaine shot the bolt with a click. "How could I help it?"

"By not, in the first place, putting me in a false position."

Swaine made no answer, and presently Catherine continued: "You see that I am awkwardly placed both with regard to Miss Carlton and yourself. You know me, I think, well enough to perceive that I am not given to petty jealousies, and I have no claim upon you whatever beyond that which your exceeding generosity has given me. No——" as Swaine made an impatient movement. "Hear me out, Norman. You know I have never expected life-long attachment from you. But I think while we are together you owe me respect."

Swaine was silent, and Catherine continued gently: "It seems an odd word, I know, for one in my position to use. I can only ask you to remember that I have been quite frank in all my dealings with you. Can you, on your part, say the same of your behaviour?"

Swaine muttered something about "That damned fool of a girl!"

Catherine again interrupted him. "The girl is within her rights," she said, "the rights that you gave her, along with—shall we say?—that silver bag."

He left the window abruptly and crossed to

the table, where he stood fingering the roll of music. It is to be conjectured that had Miss Edna Carlton caught sight of his face at that moment she would have felt her chance of ultimately winning his favour to be considerably diminished.

Catherine sat on for a few minutes watching him, then she rose.

"I owe you thanks," she said earnestly, "for having taken me into your confidence as you did. For it was owing to your former plain dealing with me that I was able to meet this girl's insinuation firmly. And that is much."

She crossed to an electric light and switched it on. Then she came close to Norman's side.

"You have brought some new music," she said.

Swaine turned at once with an air of relief. "Songs," he answered.

Catherine took up the roll. "May I look?" she asked. She undid the fastening and ran her eyes over the sheets.

"Some of these look promising, Norman. Suppose you go and see if there is anyone in the music-room, and if not, let us go down and you can try them over for me to hear."

Swaine took hold of a button on her sleeve and twisted it about in his fingers. "I'm damned sorry you've been worried by that wretched girl. Kitty," he said.

CHAPTER VII

ABSINTHE

ON the following evening the Carrs dined with Catherine and Swaine at their hotel, and after dinner the two men went off to the billiard-room, leaving Catherine and Lily seated over their coffee in the lounge.

They made a striking contrast with one another, Catherine in deep shimmering blue, with pearls at her ears and throat, Lily ruddy in brown and gold. The latter regarded with critical interest the details of her companion's attire, from the pearl-embroidered band pressed close around her head to the grey shoes with which her feet were shod.

"Norman Swaine does you pretty well, Kitty," she remarked.

Catherine turned her head to look into Lily's quizzical face and smiled.

"He is by far the most generous person I have ever known," she answered simply.

Lily eyed the pearls inquisitively. "If those are real, he must be as rich as he is generous," she answered shrewdly.

Catherine raised her hand to the necklace as she answered, "I believe Norman is very well

off. He has a private income, you know, besides his salary as an actor."

"You believe!" Lily ejaculated. "Do you mean to say you don't know?"

Catherine laughed a little. "No," she said, "I never troubled to ask him, and I suppose it didn't occur to him to tell me."

Lily stared. "Well," she said, "you're pretty slack! I knew Herbert Carr's income to a penny before I even got engaged to him."

"Doubtless; but, you see, I am not engaged to Norman."

The other was silent for a moment; then she asked brusquely, "Why don't you get him to marry you?"

Catherine flushed a little. "Because I do not wish to marry," she replied.

"Nonsense, Kitty; you can't expect me to believe that."

"No, I don't suppose I can. But it's true, all the same. . . ."

"He seems surprisingly keen on you still," pursued Lily with charming frankness. "Herbert says——" she stopped suddenly.

"What does Mr. Carr say?"

"O, well, he and Swaine used to know something of one another in London. Herbert doesn't seem to regard him as a model of faithfulness exactly."

A gleam came into Catherine's eyes. "Doubtless Mr. Carr is a judge," she said.

Lily's laugh was unconcerned. "O yes, there's not much he doesn't know. But you see he is

caught at last! And he doesn't make a bad sort of husband on the whole," she added impartially.

"No," said Catherine; "I should think he probably makes a very excellent one."

Lily jerked her head back to blow a puff of smoke ceilingwards.

"Too good for me, eh? Well, you narrowly escaped having him for a stepfather," she chaffed, and wondered what on earth made Catherine's face go red at the words. She drank the remainder of her coffee thoughtfully; then all at once she broke into a laugh.

"I'll never forget the day you were discovered to be missing, Kitty," she said. "My word, your mother did play up! I thought she was going off her head."

Catherine's face hardened. She became conscious once more of her repugnance to hearing Lily speak of the old life.

Lily, however, had got launched on the subject of Mrs. Arlsea, and Catherine knew from experience that any conjecture on her part that the matter was unwelcome would only cause her to become more eloquent.

She leaned back in her chair with her eyes fixed absently upon a man who was drinking absinthe at the next table to theirs.

He was a man named Grantham, of a rather objectionable type, who had recently come to the hotel, and whose demeanour towards her had already given Catherine some cause for uneasiness ;

so that when she found herself gazing in his direction and that he was observing her, she turned away her eyes and lent an ear to Lily's discourse.

"I was reading the paper aloud to Uncle John," that vivacious damsel was relating, "when the Conways' maid came round for me. Of course, I guessed at once what was up, as I'd been expecting every day to hear that you had gone. So I tore round at once, so as not to miss anything. My word, Kitty, how your mother did carry on! Mrs. Conway was keeping pretty quiet—indeed, there wasn't much chance for her to do anything else, once I arrived; for of course your mother fell upon me directly she saw me. She told me it was all my fault: that I had been given a charge to look after you which I had shamefully neglected: that I was a frivolous fool who had put all sorts of ideas into your head, and finally she charged me with having known all along what you were going to do.

"Of course," Lily continued, "I simply denied knowing anything whatever about it; but I waited for the first pause in the rush of her talk, and added that I wasn't a bit surprised, and that had I been in your place I should have run away long ago. At that she rose from her chair, and I believe Mrs. Conway grew afraid she would strike me, for she intervened. 'Sit down, Susan,' she said. 'It's no use blaming Lily for what is obviously your own doing.' At this your mother, of course, turned upon her; but Mrs. Conway was quite equal to the occasion. I never knew

she had so much in her, Kitty. She compelled your mother to sit and listen while she told her what she thought in plain terms. 'And I warned you months ago, Susan,' she said, 'that you were going the wrong way to work with Catherine. The girl was obviously not one to bear too strict handling. You overdid it thoroughly and have no one to blame for the outcome but yourself.'

"At this Mrs. Arlsea's wrath was diverted to Mrs. Conway, and the two had no end of a set to, which of course entertained me exceedingly. It seemed from what I could gather that Jim Conway had made some sort of offer for your hand."

Catherine sat up suddenly. "What do you say, Lily—that Jim wanted to marry me?"

"So I gathered. Of course, I was much too wise to interrupt and so divert the current of your mother's wrath to myself again; but it seemed that Jim had made some sort of advance on your account: of what nature I could not exactly make out, because Mrs. Arlsea talked so much; and as she wouldn't stop to listen to anything the other said, they were quite often both talking at once.

"Anyway," Lily continued, "I made out that Jim Conway was keen on you, which, of course, I guessed already, and that Mrs. Arlsea had chosen to consider his attentions as an insult to her dignity. She talked about his being after your money, though how he could be supposed to be after what you hadn't got I'm sure I don't know."

"But," said Catherine, who was now listening attentively, "how did Mrs. Conway receive all this? Did she seem to believe the same of Jim?"

"Well, as I said, your mother made it difficult for me to hear half what was said; but I gathered that they had spoken of the matter before, and that Mrs. Conway had told your mother you would be a lucky girl to get him. Of course, she improved the occasion by pointing out that it would be a good job if it really had been Jim.

"Mrs. Arlsea declared you must have followed him to Australia, and when Mrs. Conway pointed out that you would hardly have followed him by the next boat when you could have quite easily gone with him, she refused to listen, ordered Mrs. Conway never to mention his name again in her hearing, and threatened her with a solicitor's letter.

"The idea of Mrs. Conway's receiving a solicitor's letter because you had run away with Norman Swaine nearly sent me into a fit!" continued Lily, "and I had to get up and turn my back on Mrs. Arlsea, lest she should see my laughter. Mrs. Conway, however, was watching me, and when your mother had departed, metaphorically waving the solicitor's letter in Mrs. Conway's face and with a parting quotation something about serpent's teeth—taken from the Bible, I suppose, for I had never heard it before—Mrs. Conway turned to me and asked me point-blank if I knew where you were."

"And what answer did you make, Lily?" Catherine enquired. "Did you tell her what you knew?"

"I told her I could at any rate make a pretty good guess as to who you were with," answered Lily, "but I added that as my friendliness towards Mrs. Arlsea was not excessive, I didn't feel called upon to split on you. She asked me, if I should ever hear from you, to tell you she would like to have news of your well-being."

Catherine seemed touched. "I think she is kind," she said; "some day perhaps I will write to her."

"I expect she'd be pleased," Lily said carelessly; "she's been very dumpy lately because she has not heard from Jim."

"What do you mean, Lily—does he not write?"

"O yes, he writes regularly, as a rule. That is just what is worrying her; his letters have suddenly stopped, and it appears that when last he wrote he was ill."

A shade of trouble crossed Catherine's face. "Ill?" she said.

"Yes; he caught cold or something. I forget exactly what Mrs. Conway told me; and in his last letter he said it had gone to his chest and he was lying up a bit. Since then there's been no news of him."

"How long ago is this?"

"When we left London Mrs. Conway had not heard of him for about three weeks, I believe."

The short silence that followed was broken by the entrance of the two men, and Catherine laid aside her anxiety, to talk to Carr.

The latter was in high spirits and full of a motoring expedition he wanted to make into Italy and a wish that Catherine and Swaine should join them, which suggestion Norman received with obvious disinclination.

It was while they were discussing the matter that Catherine again noticed the man Grantham at the table near them. He had apparently been partaking of more absinthe than was good for him, and she saw that he continued to stare insolently at her, leaning forward with his elbow on the table so as to obtain a better view. As he caught Catherine's eye he smiled, an ingratiating smile. She met his eyes steadily, and then deliberately turned her shoulder and joined in Norman's conversation with Carr.

When the Carrs rose to go, Swaine accompanied them outside the hotel, and Catherine was about to reseal herself when she observed that Grantham had signalled to a waiter and was engaged in scribbling a note. Presently the waiter stood before her, offering it on an outstretched salver. "From monsieur," he indicated. Catherine ran her eye over Grantham, where he sat watching with a self-satisfied smile. Then taking the note in the tips of her fingers she tore it in half and laid the pieces back on the tray. "Take this back to monsieur," she said in clear tones. "I have not his acquaintance."

The waiter, with an ill-concealed grin, returned to the table he had just left. Grantham, who had stopped smiling and turned a dusky red, rose rather unsteadily to his feet, and when the man had come within arm's-length he struck out at the salver, which fell and rolled along the parquet floor, uttering as he did so a sentence in which Swaine's and Catherine's names were coupled.

Norman Swaine, re-entering the lounge, received the rolling salver at his feet and heard the insult.

Without a second's pause he leapt at Grantham like a tiger, seized him by his collar and jerked him out into the middle of the floor. Grantham's unsteady legs gave way beneath him and he sprawled on hands and knees on the parquet. Several men who were sitting or lounging about sprang forward. One of them got in front of Swaine, while the others pulled Grantham on to his feet and hustled him, swearing, from the room. Swaine turned on the man, facing him, the red light of anger flaming in his eyes.

"If you touch me I'll kill you," he said.

At the words Catherine, who had remained standing rigid and white, came forward and laid her hand on his arm.

He turned fiercely at her touch; but at sight of her face the red glare died slowly down. "All right, Kiity," he said with a rather unsteady laugh. "Don't you worry," and he added, with almost a return to his normal manner, "better get off upstairs. I'll go with Howard for a smoke."

The man referred to as Howard nodded approvingly, and with a courteous "Good-night Mrs. Swaine," put his arm into Swaine's and they went off in the direction of the smoking room.

Catherine went to her room, switched on the light and shut the door. She then walked across to the mirror and stood regarding her reflection. She was conscious of a strong sense of elation. She unfastened her frock, put on a dressing-gown and began to uncoil her hair, thinking all the while of the scene in the hall below. Grantham's words she had not even heard: for Swaine's spring had been so sudden that they seemed to have been whirled away in the rush of his onslaught.

The physical beauty of Norman's fine muscular action pleased her, and the red fire of his eyes lighted within her a kind of fearful joy.

Then she smiled cynically at her thought. How near to the surface lurked the primitive man and woman in all of us. Here she was, a being of intellect—save the mark!—gloating over the fact that her male possessor was ready to do battle on her behalf. She crossed to an arm-chair by the fire-place and seated herself, idly brushing out the long strands of hair that fell over her shoulders.

As her mind quieted down, her thoughts returned to Jim Conway.

There was some mystery about Jim Conway.

And it was strange that such different people believed him to have been in love with herself.

Her mother's report concerning his marriage now stood out revealed as deliberate lying: she thrust the knowledge aside as being beyond her concern.

Swaine, coming into the room in the small hours, found her sleeping soundly in the arm-chair, her hair about her shoulders and one hand holding the silver brush in her lap.

She stirred as he entered, and he came and seated himself on the arm of her chair.

"Fancy your going to sleep here, Kit," he said. "Wake up. It's all right about Grantham: we stuck his head into a basin of cold water and waited till he was sober, and he apologized for what he had said. He's willing to apologize to you as well, if you wish it; I think we'd better leave it at that."

Half awake and conscious only of the comfort of his presence, Catherine raised her arm and laid it about his neck.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ORANGE JEWEL

THERE was a dance at the *Sésame* Hotel that week, and late on the afternoon of the day on which it was to take place, Norman Swaine returned from a mysterious shopping expedition, and seeing that Catherine was seated at a desk in the writing-room, he went stealthily upstairs and entered the dressing-room, where her flame-coloured gown was laid ready for her to wear.

He put down his hat and stick, and taking a small packet out of his pocket, he deposited it upon the dressing-table and proceeded to rummage about in the drawers.

Catherine made no virtue of tidiness, and it cannot be said that Norman's search tended to make less the confusion that he found there. He swept aside gloves, ribbons and artificial flowers ; then, having failed to find what he wanted, thrust them all pell-mell back into the drawer, pushed it shut, crushing a cerise velvet rose in the aperture, and went on to another.

In the second drawer he found an old wash-leather bag which he thought might contain what he sought ; but it proved, greatly to his wonderment, to have within it what he at first sight took

to be small onions, but on closer inspection proved to be the bulbs of some plant.

He replaced them in the bag, flung it on to a chair, and continued his search. Presently he came upon what he wanted—the chain of golden discs that he had bought for Catherine to wear with her flame-coloured dress.

Norman then undid the wrappings of the box he had brought in with him and took out of it a large jewel of a deep orange colour in a plain gold setting.

He seated himself in an arm-chair beside the dressing-table and proceeded with skilful fingers to detach the centre disc from the golden chain and replace it with the flame-coloured jewel.

Presently he rose and, approaching the mirror, laid the completed circlet round his own head with naïve approval; and not without some justification, since the classic form of headgear well became his large clear-cut features and the jewel gleamed attractively against his black hair.

Hearing a step outside, he hastily left the glass, and laying the head-dress upon Catherine's gown, he reseated himself and lighted a cigarette.

Catherine appeared surprised to find him there. "Why, Norman," she said as she closed the door, "I didn't know you had returned."

Norman made no answer, and she saw that he was regarding her with a grin of anticipation.

"What are you hiding, old Fox?" she asked, laughing.

"Look and see!" chaffed Norman.

Catherine switched on a light, which glinted upon the gold disc that Norman had detached from the chain and which had fallen on the floor.

She picked it up. "A bit of my hair-ornament," she said. "O, Norman, how did it get broken? I loved it so much."

Swaine's grin deepened and Catherine looked about her. "You've been rummaging in my drawers, you Child of Sin!" she exclaimed. "It will take me weeks to find anything I want now." She stopped short and flushed a little. "Where did you find that, Norman?" she asked, pointing to the leather bag.

Swaine waved his cigarette towards the drawer. "What on earth are they, Kitty?" he asked carelessly. "I thought at first they were onions."

Catherine took up the bag from where he had thrown it and laid it upon the dressing-table. She remained with her back towards him while she released the cerise rose from its position and closed the drawer. Then she replied briefly that they were the bulbs of the hyacinths he had formerly given her, and continued her search about the room.

All at once she uttered an exclamation of delight and turned with the chain in her hands. "O, Norman," she said, "how very beautiful; what a splendid bit of colour!"

She stood for a moment gazing into the flaming heart of the gem, then with her eyes full of pleasure she came and knelt in front of Swaine's chair,

holding up the chaplet in both hands and raising her face to his.

"Put it on for me, please," she said.

He fastened the shining band round her brown hair, pushing it deftly into place and tucking back the locks that escaped from beneath it. Then he reached out and took a hand mirror from the dressing-table, which he held up for her to look into.

Catherine admired her reflection with frank satisfaction, and then, as Swaine turned to lay aside the glass, she grew all at once grave.

She crouched back on the floor and laid her hand on his knees. "Sometimes I think you are too good to me, Norman," she said with a quiver in her voice. "It makes me afraid."

Swaine laughed at her words. "Nonsense, Kits," he said. "I have lots of money, and what else is it for, do you think? It's made to roll."

But Catherine did not smile in response. She lifted her deep eyes to his. "You have never sought to bind me," she said.

Swaine lifted his shoulder. "You can't put an emotion in harness like a colt. The mere sight of the bridle would send it flying." He bent forward. "Tell me you are pleased with the jewel, my Kitten," he said; "that's all that matters at present."

Catherine sat up and put impulsive arms about his shoulders, offering her face to be kissed.

"That's right. Now get into your gold raiment

and let's see the complete effect. It's nearly dinner-time. I'll go down and have a smoke."

He left the room, and Catherine remained seated on the floor in front of his chair. Presently she raised her arms and detached the golden fillet from about her head and laid it across her lap. She rested her arm on the chair and gazed thoughtfully at the flaming jewel.

She was asking herself if she loved Norman Swaine.

He had been so very good to her, she told herself, and considering his attraction for women and the advances they invariably made to him, wonderfully constant.

She ran over in her mind the salient events of their life together, and brought up, as she invariably did, against his limitations. He so little understood real feeling, though in matters that came within the zone of his comprehension he was both generous and thoughtful. The jewel before her must have been chosen with care and judgment. She forced herself back again on the main question. Did she love him? She thought not; and was not a doubt on such a matter equivalent to a negative?

"Love is life," Norman had told her that day in the flat at Ealing. Catherine spoke the words aloud. "But life is not love," she added, and the thought came to her that though she had learned of life yet she knew not how to love.

She rose from her knees, and laying aside the chaplet, she opened a drawer and replaced the

bag containing the hyacinth bulbs where it had formerly lain.

Then she switched on more light and began to dress.

Late that night Catherine stood at the doorway in the crowded ball-room of the *Sésame* Hotel, talking to Herbert Carr. She had just been dancing to her favourite waltz tune with Norman, whom she always found a delightful partner. The jewel on her forehead shone as though with inward light, and Carr regarded her almost with wonder as he speculated anew upon the power in Norman Swaine to hold captive so beautiful a woman.

There was a momentary pause in the chatter round about the doorway, for a late train had just brought fresh arrivals for the hotel.

"English," Catherine heard a man near her remark; "it's the London train, you know."

Norman Swaine, [] with a fresh partner on his arm, half stopped. "Guess who I've just seen arriving, Kitty," he said, and then, without waiting for a reply, added, "Hugh Martin and his sister. I wonder why he didn't say in his last letter that they were coming."

BOOK III

The soul of Adonais, like a star,
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.
Adonais: SHELLEY.

CHAPTER I

MARTIN KEEPS A PROMISE

"YES, Miss Arlsea, as you say, we came out to Nice very unexpectedly."

Hugh Martin was seated opposite Catherine in her small sitting-room at the hotel. He had seen Swaine leave the house before sending up his name, and he now kept his eyes watchfully fixed on her face, as though seeking an opportunity to communicate something.

Catherine remarked his constraint, and attributed it to a not unnatural awkwardness due to the position in which he found her. She endeavoured to put him at ease by speaking frankly of Swaine. "Norman is out, Mr. Martin," she said. "He has gone to the dramatic club——"

Martin seized the opening thus offered. "I did not come to see Swaine, Miss Arlsea," he replied. "My errand is to yourself."

Catherine raised her eyes enquiringly to his. She was conscious of an odd sensation of depth in their blue shadows, in unfamiliar contrast with Swaine's black ones, and a conjecture arose in her mind as to why the lighter colour should give the impression of greater depth, even while

she wondered what it was that Martin could have to say to her.

He answered the unspoken question. "I fear it is bad news," he said. "I have come out from England in order to bring you a letter."

Catherine's eyes darkened apprehensively.

"A letter?" she said.

Martin took out his pocket-book. "About eight months ago Jim Conway came to see me, bringing this. It is addressed to you."

He rose and came across to where she sat, holding out the letter.

Catherine took it, but Martin did not immediately uncloset his fingers. "Miss Arlsea," he said gently, "I promised Conway that I would put this into your own hands when I received news of a certain event. I received the news last week in London."

A little of the colour left Catherine's face as she asked, "What was the news?"

"Of Conway's death."

The words fell as with a sound of a stone flung into deep water. Catherine gathered the letter tightly into her hand and sat motionless, watching Martin return to his chair. In the distress of her mind she noted mechanically the little lines of thought about his eyes and the curve of a sensitive mouth.

"He was my friend," she said at last, "long ago."

Martin did not turn his head. "Yes," he replied simply; "I know."

Unconsciously she raised the letter to her breast. "There is so much that I do not understand," she said.

Very quietly Martin told her all that he himself knew: beginning with Jim's visit to the flat at Ealing and their talk together, telling her of Conway's ill health and his knowledge of the fact that he would never return to England. He omitted all mention of Swaine, and finished with an account of Jim's last illness, as Mrs. Conway had gleaned the details from her son's letters and those received from a friend of Jim's at the ranch, who, it seemed, had been with him at the end. "Conway saw what lay before him very clearly," Martin concluded. "He was a man of exceptional courage, and death did not find him unprepared."

Catherine was crying.

Martin's eyes rested wistfully on her bowed head. "We must not pity him because he was brave," he said softly.

She shook her head. She felt in this moment a strange knowledge of his sympathy and understanding, and knew that she could speak the thoughts that troubled her. She dried her tears.

"Mr. Martin," she said, "my—they told me he had a wife in Queensland. That, I suppose, was a lie?"

A tinge of colour crept into Martin's face. "Certainly it was a lie," he said. "Why should it have been told you?"

Catherine flashed him a look. "Because there

are souls so poor and mean that they cannot understand friendship."

Martin realized the depths that lay behind her tears. "I think when you have read the letter, Miss Arlsea, you will know that he cared only for yourself," he said quietly.

"Why, then, did he not take me with him?"

"It did not seem right to him to do so, knowing as he did that he could not live."

"But I would so gladly have gone—O, it is terrible, to picture him ill—and alone——"

Martin made a little movement of his hand. "Some of us are called upon to face death," he said, "while others must struggle with the problems of life. They need courage equally."

Catherine nodded. "We are all bound to the wheel of destiny; and must go with it as it turns!" He said that once, when I asked him if he were obliged to go away. I must have hurt him so often by begging him to stay."

Martin was silent again. Then after a few moments he began speaking of his sister. He told Catherine of the death of her husband and how he had feared that Clare would never recover from the blow. "And indeed it has outwardly changed her," he added, "but those of us who are her friends know that the steady loyalty of her nature remains untouched, and that beneath her incisive manner there are depths of understanding and sympathy." He paused, and Catherine asked a little timidly whether Mrs. Wilton would see her.

"She came out with me at my request, Miss Arlsea," Martin answered, "because Conway expressed to me a wish that you might, if at any time it seemed desirable to you, find friends in us both."

He rose. "You will like to be alone, to read your letter," he said gently. He held out his hand and Catherine put hers into it. "Shall I tell my sister she may come to see you?" he asked.

Catherine's deep eyes rested on his and she smiled. "Surely," she answered, "if she will come to-morrow afternoon I shall be glad."

The door closed behind him and she resumed her seat. For some moments she sat looking at the sealed envelope and gathering her courage. Then she carefully broke the seal and began to read.

C A THERINE,

When you receive this letter I shall have set out on that journey from which no man has returned to tell us how he fared.

Do not let this thing be a grief to you, dear girl; we must each tread the appointed path, and all that matters is courage and a clear vision.

Think no more of it.

There are two things I wish to say to you. The first concerns money. I understand that you have hitherto been kept in ignorance of the fact that on reaching the age of twenty-one you inherit half of your father's not inconsiderable fortune. This fact, which I first learned from my mother, I have taken pains to verify by an inspection of Robert Arlsea's will. It has, however, occurred to me that before reaching the age specified you may easily find yourself in circumstances where a small income

would prove of material assistance in determining your future plans. I have therefore left to you in my will a sufficient sum, to be paid over to you quarterly by my solicitors, Messrs. Sterling and Gray, of Lincoln's Inn, until the date of your twenty-first birthday, when the money will revert to my mother, who inherits the rest of my property.

The second matter I have to speak of is very different.

I want to remind you—and believe me when I say that I do so very gently and lovingly—of another inheritance. You already know, for it was indeed yourself who told me of it, that you have a legacy of mind left you by your father.

The events, grave or gay, of life may temporarily veil your eyes from beholding his spirit clearly. But to me it seems that the more you know of life the more you will recognize the force of love in the world. You will, I think, come to see that love is an aspect of Ultimate Truth: that such incidents as sex, age and relationship are mere accidents and do not alter Love nor detract from its singleness. Rather is each individual manifestation a facet of the jewel, serving only to enrich the intrinsic splendour of the gem. It was your father's love for you and yours for him that first set your feet in the way of life; and as you tread the path you will find other interests and other loves, and these accepted and envisaged will lead you again into communion with his spirit.

For you, love is of Robert Arlsea.

Think a little sometimes of the love of one who was your friend.

JIM CONWAY.

Catherine folded the letter and put it away. She leaned her elbow on the table and bent her face on her hand.

The place was quiet, for it was the hour before *déjeuner*, when all Nice was promenading. A sudden patter of voluble French broke on her

ears as a servant opened and closed a door somewhere in the corridor. The clang of hammer strokes from a blacksmith's shop at the back of the hotel rang out with metallic persistence.

The sound brought with it an odd sensation of heartlessness.

It seemed to her all at once that she was alone in the world and not a little afraid. She stirred uneasily and wished that Norman would come in; and it was with a sensation of comfort that she at length heard his step in the passage and the notes of a song in his rich baritone. She lifted her face eagerly to him as he entered, and spoke his name. "I am glad you are come back," she said.

Swaine came over to where she was sitting by the table. "The rehearsal went off very well," he told her; "Gregson is a bit of a stick, but all the rest were quite up to it——" He stopped as he caught sight of Catherine's face. "You've been crying," he said with vexed surprise.

She told him of Martin's visit and briefly related the news he had brought.

Swaine turned away and fingered a French journal that lay open on the table. "I suppose it was not altogether unexpected," he said awkwardly; "Conway was never very strong."

"I know, but he died so far away and alone——" Catherine rose and came close to him, laying her hand upon his arm.

"Speak to me, Norman," she said; "I—I am troubled."

Swaine turned his head away in evident discomfort. "We've all got to die some day," he said uneasily; "there's no use worrying about it till the time comes."

Catherine's hand slipped from his arm and she returned to her chair. In the moments that followed she realized that Swaine was mentally cursing Hugh Martin for having brought bad news. The silence was broken by the sound of a gong.

With a movement of relief Swaine pushed aside the journal and went towards the door. "I will order something to be sent up to you," he said; "you can't very well go down to the public dining-room with your face in that state. People will see that you have been crying."

Catherine assented to the arrangement and he left her.

When he returned an hour later he found that she had changed her dress, and though she was paler than usual and appeared rather quiet, she spoke to him in her ordinary tones and readily agreed to his proposal that they should go for a run in the car.

CHAPTER II

SWAINE MAKES A STATEMENT

THAT night Swaine announced to Catherine that he had 'phoned to Carr agreeing to join them in the trip to Italy and arranging to start the next day.

She lowered her book so as to look at him over the top of it. "I thought you had decided against going?" she said.

Swaine, who was writing a letter, did not look up, but replied rather curtly that he judged it proper they should have a change from Nice.

Catherine considered him attentively. He had, she thought, the air of nursing a grievance.

"I should like to have remained here over tomorrow, Norman," she said. "I arranged with Mr. Martin that his sister should visit me."

Swaine blotted his paper and replied that Catherine could send a note to Mrs. Wilton in the morning putting her off.

Catherine laid the open book on her lap and thought for a few moments before replying. "Perhaps, Norman," she said slowly, "you don't realize that Mr. Martin and his sister came out from England on purpose to see me."

Swaine raised his head and stared at her.
"To see you?"

"Yes. He brought me a letter that had been entrusted to him by Jim Conway." She noted Swaine's uneasy movement and went quickly on: "Knowing that you dislike such worries, I did not intend troubling you with these details, but since you have spoken of it, I had better, perhaps, explain how the matter stands."

She then related the information she had that day received concerning the inheritance of her father's money, which had hitherto been concealed from her, and of Jim's legacy.

Swaine bit the end of his pen in silence. The whole affair annoyed him exceedingly. News of illness or a death always afflicted him with a sense of personal injury, and that Catherine should become possessed of an income, however small, was to some extent a blow aimed at his ascendancy.

The fact of the letter under discussion being from one who was now no longer living held him silent on that score and directed his anger afresh against Martin.

He recollected Lily Carr's assertion concerning the latter's having found Catherine attractive, and scented intrigue. "Was there anything else in the letter?" he asked abruptly.

Catherine appeared surprised, but answered at once that there had been a private message for herself alone, and which she did not care to speak of.

Swaine's suspicion was confirmed. He remained

silent for some time, whilst he addressed and stamped his letter. "I will take this out," he said; "I want it to catch the night mail."

He took the letter to the general post office, and turned his steps to the *Sésame* Hotel, where he asked for Martin.

When they had greeted one another Martin found a deserted corner in the lounge, and when Swaine had refused his offer of refreshment they sat for a time talking of trivial matters.

Martin understood very well that the other had not come in a friendly spirit, and he preferred to leave the initiative to Swaine.

The latter presently informed him that he had decided to take Catherine away from Nice for a motor trip through Italy, and requested that Mrs. Wilton's visit might be postponed till their return.

Martin regarded him attentively. "Is that Miss Arlsea's wish?" he asked.

"It is my wish," Swaine replied. "I consider it desirable that Catherine should have a change of scene. The news you brought her this morning has had a very depressing effect upon her spirits."

A shade of trouble crossed Martin's face. "I regret that," he said. "I had no alternative but to carry out Conway's wishes."

Swaine raised his shoulders. "The anxiety of Conway and yourself is unnecessary," he said. "I am perfectly able to provide for Miss Arlsea's wants; and I think she will tell you that I have not counted costs."

"I for one never questioned it, Swaine."

"Conway apparently did so, as he thought fit to make provision for her future."

Martin made a quick gesture. "You tell me that of which I was unaware," he said. "The contents of Conway's letter are unknown to me."

"Let me, then, make you aware of them, Martin. And let me at the same time inform you that I resent the imputation contained in them. I have no qualification for the part of villain in a Drury Lane melodrama——"

Martin interrupted. "In justice to Conway I think you should understand that letter I brought to Miss Arlsea to-day was given into my charge nearly a year ago. You were, if you will recollect, at that time in London, acting in 'The Ivory Fan,' and at the very commencement of your acquaintance with Miss Arlsea. O, you need not take my word for this," he added; "you can verify my statement by asking her to show you the date on the letter."

The perception that he had made Martin aware of his not having read the letter shaped itself annoyingly to Swaine.

"We can leave Conway out of it," he said abruptly. "Especially as he's no longer living. But you, Martin, had better understand that I'm not keen on being cast for the rôle of heartless seducer."

Martin grasped at his vanishing sense of justice. "I have always recognized your generosity where money was concerned, Swaine," he said with an effort.

"Please recognize also that I am not easily fooled. If, as I guess, you came out to Nice in the hope of inducing Miss Arlsea to return to England with your sister and yourself, you had better spare the expense of a lengthened stay."

Martin's face had lost colour. "I came out to Nice to fulfil a promise," he replied coldly, "and shall leave when it suits me."

Swaine looked him over for a moment in angry silence.

Then he said, "In that case it may prevent misunderstandings for you to know that I intend to ask Miss Arlsea to be my wife."

To say that these words surprised Martin would be to state the obvious. It is a more interesting fact that they amazed Swaine.

In the silence that followed their utterance he wondered where the idea had come to him from. If he had been told on entering the hotel that he would give voice to such a statement, he would have laughed in scorn of the suggestion.

Now, as he heard himself speak the words, they seemed to fall upon his ear from without, bringing with them an astonishing train of possibilities.

When, however, the first startling sensation had passed, he had a gratifying sense of their effect upon Martin.

The latter's face had taken on an odd look, as if the blue eyes saw something a long way off, and Swaine, looking at him, remarked to himself that Martin was no longer in his first youth and that he could never have been particularly hand-

some. Then he returned to a contemplation of his own magnanimity and his spirits rose.

"You perceive that it is unsafe to calculate on the villain touch," he remarked. "It's all very well on the boards, but in real life the parts are apt to become mixed."

Martin roused himself. "You emphasize the fact unnecessarily," he said; "I believe I have lived long enough in the world to know that its black and white merges imperceptibly into grey. It would be to disparage Miss Arlsea's judgment to suppose that she would chose unworthily," he added, and his voice sounded strange in his own ears.

Swaine laughed easily. "Catherine made her choice last autumn," he declared. "She will scarcely find reason to go back upon it!"

A little light glinted in Martin's eyes and was gone again.

"My wish is for happiness," he said formally.

"Thanks," Swaine laughed. "I don't see why it shouldn't work all right. We can't be said to be taking a leap in the dark, anyhow—we ought to know something of one another after six months of Nice. Don't you think so?"

Martin turned his head. "There is my sister coming downstairs," he remarked in queer, stifled tones. He moved abruptly to meet her, and Clare, coming forward, noticed that the light from a globe near glistened on his forehead.

She offered her hand to Swaine in silence, waiting for an explanation of his call.

"I came with a message from Miss Arlsea," he told her. "She wishes you to postpone your visit to her to-morrow."

He became conscious that Clare Wilton's eyes focused themselves, and added the information about their trip to Italy with just a suggestion of defiance.

Clare drew a chair forward and seated herself; Martin also sat down, but Swaine perched himself on the arm of a sofa with an air of detachment.

Mrs. Wilton drew out a cigarette-case. "You will be able to visit the gardens at La Mortola," she remarked conversationally; "Miss Arlsea would delight in them."

Swaine shrugged his shoulders. "Do you fancy they would appeal to me?" he asked.

Mrs. Wilton looked him over as she struck a match. "I hear Macchiavelli once made a stay there," she observed drily.

Swaine laughed shortly as he replied, "Macchiavelli lived before the days of motors. I want, if possible, to show Miss Arlsea Venice, and perhaps I shall take her on to Rome as well."

Clare regarded him with a perfect comprehension that he found excessively annoying.

"We shall remain at Nice for Carnival," Martin said. "It would be a pity to take so long a journey and yet miss that."

Swaine was reminded of certain arrangements of his own for the enjoyment of the festival, and did not stop to seek for a double meaning in

Martin's words. He rose to his feet. "We are leaving at the end of March," he remarked easily. "I want to be in Paris for Mi-Carême."

A party of the hotel's guests had approached their corner, and settling themselves round a small table, signalled for a waiter. Swaine ran his eyes over them carelessly, and noted in passing that one of the girls was rather handsome.

He turned to Martin, who had also risen. "I don't know whether you have heard that there's a new piece coming on at the 'Orpheus' in May," he said. "I am cast for a principal part." He flashed a glance at the girl, who was looking at him, attracted by his resonant tones, and then looked at Martin.

"None of my normal villainy, you see," he laughed. "I'm taking the unaccustomed rôle of a good boy this time, so of course I must show up at rehearsals."

Clare's eyes went to her brother's face, and a recollection that Hugh was sometimes said to resemble herself darted into her mind.

Martin made some allusion to the military character of Swaine's accustomed parts.

Norman laughed easily. "I'm a dog of a fighter," he said. "Catherine will tell you with what melodramatic effect I laid a chap out on the floor the other evening."

"Indeed," Clare was betrayed into a drawl. "May one ask his offence?"

"That of interfering in what did not concern him," said Swaine, and turning, he bade Martin

good-night. He then shook hands with Clare, who did not rise from her chair, and as he passed the table where the newcomers were busy with coffee-cups, he raised his eyes and met those of the girl, who continued to regard him with lively interest.

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CHAPTER III

THE DEAD BLACKBIRD

IT is when the pedestrian leaves behind him the pretentiousness of modern Nice and begins to grope his way into the sincerity and squalor of the "old town" that he suddenly finds himself bemused by the riot of colour and sound that characterizes the flower market. A significant comment upon human nature is this market and its ways: a place where the heart of the South seems to blossom in crimson and gold, only to serve for the gratification of luxury, on the one hand, and rapacity on the other.

As he walked slowly along the narrow passage between the trestle tables, Hugh Martin noted the brown faces of the peasants, the shrill town voices of portresses, the sharp glance and heated altercation, the yelp of a frightened dog.

A hard-faced woman thrust a magnificent bouquet of carnations into his face with "*Des beaux œillets, monsieur?*" A cruel-looking youth pressed a bough laden with the golden globes of oranges upon his notice; a girl, hatless and elaborate as to coiffure, drew her scarf closer about her shoulders and turned from a steady

scrutiny of his face to make a remark to her companion, of which Martin caught only the final words, "*comme des pervenches*." For some reason the expression made him smile, and the girl smiled in response with sudden friendliness.

He was still smiling a little when he turned the corner of a stall piled high with scarlet anemones and came full upon Catherine Arlsea. She was standing motionless, and looking down upon some object lying upon the stall in front of her, her skirts caught together in her right hand and the curve of her left arm heaped with violets.

She started a little, and as his eyes met hers he saw that they were full of tears. He took off his hat silently, and Catherine, letting go of her skirt, raised her hand and pointed to where, on the table before her, lay a dead blackbird, its head dangling, its beak fallen open. "Their woods are silent," she said very low, "and there are none who care."

The woman behind the stall eyed them keenly, and lifting the bird, pressed it upon their notice, crying that it was fat.

Catherine shuddered. She took out her purse and paid the price asked. "I will bury it in the hotel garden," she said to Martin, as she laid it gently amongst the violets on her arm.

She brushed her hand across her eyes and moved away, seeming to take it for granted that he would walk with her.

And as they went down the centre of the market she spoke of the Southern people with their

strange mixture of cruelty and kindness, and related incidents that had attracted her notice in the streets. She spoke with a kind of self-forgetful earnestness. It seemed as though in these months she had been garnering thoughts and impressions for the knowledge of her present listener in her heart, and now that he was coming they welled forth in the certainty of his understanding.

"And yet the French are so good, one and all," she added with a sudden gleam of pleasure as they came upon a stall laden with the creamy Nîmes roses, arranged in gigantic vases under a canopy of orange boughs and the elliptical fruits of lemon trees.

They passed again the girl who had noticed Martin, and she touched her companion and jerked her head towards them as they went by. "*C'est sa femme,*" Catherine heard her say, and then, "*Comme cela doit être heureuse : elle est si gentille—lui.*"

She turned and looked at Martin. He was regarding her attentively, as though trying to read her thoughts, and did not appear to have heard the girl's words. She was conscious of a sensation of contentment. This man was different. He liked to listen. He understood the feeling that lay behind what was said.

They had emerged from the market now, and they crossed to the Public Garden, where children cried to one another in their shrill French while their *bonnes* tossed coquettish cap-streamers

chattered to the blue-smocked workmen engaged in hanging many-coloured lamps to serve as decoration for the approaching Carnival. Catherine seated herself upon one of the chairs and rearranged her violets so as to conceal the dead bird lying on her arm, and Martin took the chair next hers, his eyes on her deftly moving fingers. A silence fell between them, for Catherine had become oppressed with the consciousness of her own anomalous position and Martin feared to break in upon her thoughts.

All at once she lifted her face to his. "Mr. Martin," she said, "I may have to leave Nice this afternoon. Do you think your sister would understand if I ask her to put off her visit until my return?"

Martin replied that Clare already understood. "Swaine called last night to explain," he added.

Catherine showed surprise. "I did not know that," she said, and fell silent again for a time before adding, "He has been more than generous to me all along. It is right that I should meet his wishes whenever it is possible to do so."

"Yes," replied Martin; "certainly it is right. Do not let the matter trouble you. We shall stay in Nice for some time, I believe," he added, "though hardly at our present hotel, and Swaine told us you will be returning for Carnival."

An expression of content came into Catherine's face. "I was afraid you would be going away again," she answered simply.

The hum of traffic on the distant promenade

rose and fell, broken at intervals by the brazen notes of a band playing the Carnival March and, nearer to the unfashionable end of the gardens where they sat, the wash of the sea on the pebbly beach.

"The Mediterranean is very blue to-day," Catherine said. "It varies curiously. I like it best when the evening is falling and the palms stand out black against its shine. One seems to realize its limitations so by daylight. I never get away from the knowledge of its surrounding coasts."

"Yet Greece is there," answered Martin, and pointed eastwards.

Catherine's eyes shone. "The Greeks are everywhere," she said. "The light of them shines down the ages."

She began speaking again, telling Martin of a room in the museum at Monaco where a sheet of glass had been let into the floor so that the visitor could look down on the sea dashing against the rocks on which the palace was built, and quoted Euripides:

Birds, birds, everywhere,
White as the foam, light as the air;
And ghostly Achilles raceth there,
Far in the friendless waters.

"The curator of the museum gave me a sea-horse," she added rather inconsequently; "it pleased me ever so much."

Martin asked a question about the museum,

which he had never seen, and Catherine told of its wonderful aquaria, some of them crowded with waving sea-anemones, half plant, half creature as it seemed, and a riot of living colour; and of the long gallery full of specimens of deep-sea creatures. "Only those which could be brought to the surface," she added, "for the curator told me that the ones from the very great depths always burst."

She fell silent for a while, and then added suddenly, "I think some natures are like that. They need deep water. The surface of things shatters their personality."

Martin smiled. "'We are for all waters,'" he quoted. "I think they are the wisest who know alike the shadow and the sun."

Catherine's eyes rested questioningly on his. "Wisest," she said. "But are they happier?"

"Wisdom is of that which is True, Miss Arlsea. Happiness is harmony and harmony is Truth."

Catherine raised her eyes to the cloudless Southern blue.

"'The greatest of these is Love,'" she quoted softly, as though to herself.

Swaine, standing at the hotel window waiting for the sound of the gong to announce *déjeuner*, saw Catherine enter the drive and turn aside behind some orange-trees.

"What the deuce is Kitty up to?" was his unspoken question; and he resolved to go out and investigate the matter after lunch.

At *déjeuner* Catherine asked him what time they should start on their trip, and Swaine told her, adding that all arrangements had been made by him, including the postponement of Mrs. Wilton's visit.

Catherine replied that she was aware of this and spoke of her meeting with Martin.

Swaine noted a subtle difference in her look; she seemed more vivid, he thought, a kind of glow——

"Sort of place Martin would frequent," Martin remarked, and pausing to lift a glass of vermouth to his lips, he met Catherine's eyes over its brim and saw in their depths a spark of resentment.

The sight filled him with a determination to persist. He pursued the subject of Martin, relating anecdotes of their life together in which Martin's disadvantage was, as he supposed, apparent, and Catherine, after her first flash of indignation had died down, listened silently.

He recounted an episode connected with a shop-girl whom Martin had befriended and who, misunderstanding his advances, had desecrated an establishment *à deux* in the near future, and he gave an amusing account of Martin's efforts to disabuse her mind without unduly hurting her feelings. Catherine's eyes lit up with a smile at this history, and Swaine, having enlarged to his satisfaction on Martin's concern over the turn affairs had taken, left the subject with a sense of having gained his end.

When *déjeuner* was over, however, and Catherine

had gone upstairs to pack for their trip, he recollected her behaviour on entering the garden, and lighting a cigarette, he strolled with apparent aimlessness in the direction of the group of orange-trees. Turning the corner out of sight of the hotel windows, he saw that the ground at his feet had been disturbed, and he scraped the soil up with his boot and came upon the body of the dead blackbird, surrounded by now wilted violets. He uttered an exclamation of disgust and stood looking down upon it. The thing seemed to have some subtle connection with Martin, and to be suggestive of an insinuation to his own disadvantage.

He took up the bird in the tips of his fingers and swung it on to a rubbish heap in the vicinity. Then he kicked the earth back over the place where it had lain, and wiping his fingers with his handkerchief, returned to the house.

CHAPTER IV

LILY SPEAKS HER MIND

THE Italian trip was on the whole a success. Norman had been very generous. He had apparently wished that the tour should prove enjoyable and had spared no expense to arrange everything to the best possible advantage. Even Lily, who since her marriage with Carr had made haste to forget the gentle art of economy, expressed surprise at Swaine's expenditure and observed that he must be a millionaire. But Swaine only laughed. "The great art is to get value for your money," he told her. And he added impudently, "Norman Carr doesn't know much about that." To which Lily retorted, "He knows more than you think," Norman Swaine," and was nettled at Swaine's serene disregard of the innuendo.

Swaine and Lily saw a good deal of one another during the trip, although it can scarcely be said that their intimacy was of the friendliest, since they quarrelled almost incessantly.

Carr had conceived an ardent friendship for Catherine. He insisted on escorting her to picture galleries and museums, whither Swaine was resolute in his refusal to accompany her; and he listened with dog-like patience and admiration

while she pointed out to him the wonder of a statue or the depth of colour in a picture. Lily, on her part, regarded this growth of interest with amused contempt, for she was far too astute not to perceive that Catherine was entirely to be trusted, and she was not altogether adverse to an inclination on Carr's part that resulted in the occasional exchange of his society for that of Norman Swaine, provoking as the latter generally contrived to be.

"The mystery to me is how Catherine Arlsea has put up with you for so long," she told him at the close of a heated argument. "It must be the effect of not being compelled to do so. If it had been a case of 'for better for worse,' she'd have run away from you long ago."

They were seated outside a hotel at Venice, and Swaine jerked his cigarette end into the canal, where it went out with a sharp sizzle.

"What would you say if I told you that I mean to ask Catherine to marry me?" he asked suddenly.

Lily stared. "I'd say she would refuse," was her curt reply.

Swaine gave a careless laugh. "I thought you considered yourself a judge of human nature," he said.

"I do."

"And you can suppose that?"

"I have too much judgment to suppose it: I know it."

Swaine turned an incredulous eye upon her.

"I have my attractions," he remarked dispassionately, "and I am not badly off."

Lily laughed. "Do you really think that would make any difference to Catherine Arlsea?" she asked.

Norman followed a passing gondola with his eyes. "You married Carr," he observed.

"Look here, Norman Swaine," said Lily suddenly, and Swaine turned his head, surprised by the sincerity in her tones. "Do you think I am going to compare myself with Catherine Arlsea? Because if you suppose I'm such a fatuous ass you are mistaken. It's quite true I married Herbert Carr for his money. Not that he isn't a good chap in his way, and I can trust him out of my sight, too—which is more than any woman in her senses could do for you."

"Thanks so much," put in Swaine drily.

Lily took no notice of the interruption. "You and me and Carr," she said ungrammatically, "one way or another we're all of a piece. What do you suppose we should be if it were not for the varnish our education has laid over us? You, as a slum-dweller, would drink and kick your wife——"

"I don't drink——"

"No. It isn't necessary when you can imbibe a cocktail at every bar you pass and sip champagne after dinner. As for me, I should be a thief, of course. For if I couldn't buy the feathers for my holiday hat, I'd steal them."

"So now we know!" said Swaine, leaning

back in his chair and contemplating Lily's semi-earnestness with huge entertainment. "What about Herbert Carr?"

"Carr!" Lily's tone dropped to good-humoured contempt. "O, he'd be the same in any class. And, as a matter of fact, his father carried the coal that Herbert has made his fortune from. He's an honest merchant, and if he'd had no education he'd have been an honest labourer. That's all the difference there would be."

"I had no idea you were so keen a student of humanity in general, Mrs. Lily!"

Lily looked across the water. "I can see the campanile very well at midday," she observed. Then after a pause she went on:

"Catherine Arlsea is a different being from ourselves. I should indeed be a fine fool if I didn't recognize that. And as for your money making a bid for her favour—well, you'd stand a better chance if you'd lost all you had in the world and asked her to take you for pity." She stopped, rather red and out of breath, and Swaine regarded her with intense amusement.

"A champion!" he ejaculated.

Lily twisted her shoulders impatiently. "You're enough to make anyone mad," she said. "Here you've been living with Catherine for the past six months——"

"Seven," put in Norman, "and that's a further inducement——"

"Seven, then, and you know no more about her as she really is than the man in the moon.

Why, Hugh Martin could give you points on the subject—O, that stings you, does it! Well, it's saving grace that you're jealous, even if it is a better man than yourself."

Swaine's eyes gleamed. "Your tongue run away with you," he said sharply; "you had better learn to control it."

"You'd better look out that Hugh Martin doesn't run away with something of yours, and leave my tongue alone."

"If it's Catherine you are alluding to, I can trust her perfectly, as you yourself remarked just now."

"O yes, she'll never deceive you knowingly, I grant you that. But even the most sincere people may not always read their own hearts aright."

She rose to brush the cigarette ash from her gown. "Here are Herbert and Catherine," she said.

A gondola floated down the canal and rested at the foot of the steps leading up to the hotel entrance. Carr jumped out and assisted Catherine to land. He then turned to pay the gondolier and Catherine came up the steps to where Swaine was sitting. She caught at a light chair stand near and dragged it to his side. "Look, Ned, man," she said happily. "See what Mr. Carr has given me." She unrolled a packet that she carried and disclosed a fine engraving of Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa."

"Is it not delightful?" she asked. "I know

wishing the original painting were here in Italy. It seems wrong that the Parisians should have her."

Swaine looked at the picture, and then glanced at Catherine's eager face and from her to Lily. "That chap understood women," he remarked.

Lily's mouth twitched. "Some," she said.

Swaine laughed shortly. "O, you all have the smile somewhere in your make-up," he said, "though you may have the sense not to wear it on your faces."

"We must hoodwink the male of the species," retorted Lily, "though in some cases it's easier than others. It depends upon the degree of egotism we encounter."

Catherine, who was rolling the picture carefully, looked up. "I do believe you two have been quarrelling again!" she laughed. "It's not safe to leave you alone together! What have you been doing to Norman, Lily? I won't have him bullied—it spoils his temper!"

"I should have thought that was impossible," said Lily.

Catherine raised her brows whimsically. "He is not at all easily made cross," she protested.

"No," returned Lily, "he's too jolly conceited. Come on, Herbert, let us leave these love-birds to coo. Prosaic folk like us are out of place here." She turned and went into the hotel, and Carr, who had come up the steps, laughingly followed her.

Catherine smiled at him gratefully as he passed.

"Thank you, Mr. Carr," she said. "It's been ever such a happy morning."

She bent over the picture again, tying it lightly together.

Norman broke the silence. "She thinks don't appreciate you," he said.

"Who, Lily?" Catherine looked amused.

"Yes, but she's wrong." He bent toward her and seized her arm roughly. "If any other man tried to take you from me, I'd kill him."

Catherine met the red gleam in his eyes steadily though she had lost a little of her colour.

"You are hurting my arm, Norman," she said.

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CHAPTER V

"CHINOIS"

CLARE WILTON was buying a mask. She was bending over a stall outside a cheap draper's in the *Avenue de la Gare*, talking voluble if ungrammatical French to a gesticulating shop-assistant, and giving vent to her feelings in very vigorous English asides to her brother, who stood beside her and listened with quiet amusement.

"Better have one from the bottom of the pile, Clare," he remarked. "It's less likely to have been tried on the faces of half the *gamins* in Nice!"

Clare wrinkled her nose and fished out a couple of the largest. "I'll cover them in blue to match our blouses," she said.

"These cost again dearer," vouchsafed the shopman.

"O, they do, do they? What can I have the pair for?"

The man pointed to a placard in the window. "Here the price is fixed, madame."

"One price only! The highest! Wrap them up, monseigneur; I'll take them. Now let's go and buy confetti."

They moved on to another shop where bags

of paper confetti were standing in rows like flour at a corn-chandler's, and while Clare went in to drive a bargain, Hugh looked about him at the crowd that pushed and jostled one another along the dusty pavement. For it was the eve of Carnival, and Carnival was in the air, literally as well as figuratively, for a brass band was braying the march of the year at a neighbouring crossing. Martin watched a group of laughing, gesticulating girls, two of whom were pushing a third into a domino at the street stall of a cheap draper's. She was uttering shrill little squeaks of protest and appealing vainly to the lynx-eyed stall-keeper to let her have a larger sized one for the same price. A group of youths came capering down the street, arm in arm and singing to the air of the Carnival march, until they were disbanded by the strident reprimand of a gendarme. Martin found himself in the way of energetic shoppers and went to the edge of the curb, where he leaned against the trunk of a plane-tree that glistened silver in the electric light streaming from a shop close by, the windows of which were filled with baskets of crystallized fruits.

Clare was a long time, he thought. He supposed she had to wait; half Nice must be buying confetti to-night. He turned his head to look back into the shop. He could just see the purple feather in her hat; she was apparently about to be served.

A motor drew up at the crystallized-fruit shop, a man sprang out, and a woman's voice said,

"Ask what is underneath, '*au fond*,' you know. There should be '*des petits fruits au fond*'; and don't forget '*couvercle*' is a lid, Norman, not '*couverture*,' as you said yesterday!" The voice ended in a gurgle, and Martin turned his head to look into the laughing face of Catherine Arlsea. She was leaning forward in the car and calling the words after Swaine, who was half-way across the pavement towards the fruit shop. He entered it, and as she leaned back again her eyes met Martin's. She drew a little sharp breath. "O, Mr. Martin," she said, "I did not see you against the tree. You are still in Nice, then? I am glad."

Martin had come forward and lifted his hat, and she put out her hand. "We only returned yesterday," she added, "and we are shopping hard on account of Carnival."

He smiled. "So are we," he declared. "My sister must be buying pounds of confetti, judging from the time she has been in the shop."

"I shall look out for you both to-morrow; tell me what you are going to wear."

Martin laughed. "Blue blouses," he replied, "like a French workman's. Clare embroidered them with smocking. She says she considers them very *chic*. How shall we recognize Swaine and yourself, Miss Arlsea?"

"I don't think it would be difficult to recognize Norman," said Catherine; "he must be one of the tallest men in Nice——"

"Kitty," said Swaine's voice at Martin's elbow,

"what are *chinois*? They say they have no oranges, only *chinois*——" he stopped abruptly. "Hallo, Martin," he said. "Where did you spring from?"

"I think he fell out of a tree, like Cyrano!" laughed Catherine.

Swaine looked from one to another. "Who's Cyrano?" he asked, and added, "O, I know Chap with the long nose—you ought to go carnisivalling in that rôle, Martin. Just suit you. Shall I take the what-d'you-call-'ems, Kitty?"

He turned his back and re-entered the shop where they saw him begin an explanation to the shop-girl, who evidently found his absurd French both amusing and attractive.

Catherine turned to Martin and her face was grave. "You knew Norman long before I came to France with him," she said, and there was a faint pleading in her voice.

"Yes, Miss Arlsea, and of all I know of him that fact represents the very best. Forgive me," he added, as he saw the look that came into her eyes. "I forget myself." He took off his hat again. "I will return to lean against my plane tree—*à la Cyrano*," he added whimsically, "and endeavour to retain my *panache*!"

He moved abruptly aside, and Clare, coming out of the shop five minutes later with an apology on her lips and her arms full of bags of confetti, found him still there, his face raised and his eyes fixed on the little fuzzy balls of the plane, where its branches drooped against a street lamp.

"Here is a reward for patience," she chaffed, plumping a bag of confetti into his hands. Then, as she caught sight of his face, "Whatever is the matter, Hugh? You look as though you had seen a ghost."

He stirred. "I have seen Catherine Arlsea," he said; "Catherine Arlsea and Norman Swaine. Come, Clare, let us go home now."

When Catherine and Swaine reached their sitting-room at the hotel after a very silent drive home, the former at once spoke regretfully of the incident in the *Gare*. Swaine, who was carrying the gilded basket containing the *chinois*, set it down on the table with a thump.

"I won't have Martin hanging round you, Kitty," he said determinedly. "He needn't think it. He ought to remember me well enough to know that it's just about the last thing I should tolerate."

"But, my dear Norman, what do you suppose? Not that I appointed Mr. Martin to lean on a plane-tree in the *Gare* on chance that I should come into view in a motor. It would be rather precarious, wouldn't it?"

Swaine walked over to the fire-place. The fender had become thrust forward at one side, and he kicked it into position.

"I'll not enter into any details of time or place," he said. "I simply won't have Martin or any other man hanging about after you."

Catherine, who was regarding the dogged curve of his shoulders, suddenly laughed. "I don't think you are displaying your usual sense of humour, Norman," she remarked.

Swaine turned sharply. "So you find it funny?"

"That you should suppose Mr. Martin spends his evenings awaiting my possible arrival in the *Avenue de la Gare*? Very!"

Swaine took down a china bowl from the mantelshelf and set it noisily beside the basket.

"Look here, Kitty," he said; "Martin came out here to see you and brought that sister of his with him. You told me so yourself."

Catherine seated herself, and taking off her hat, held it on her lap. "I told you the reason, Norman," she said gravely.

"You told me your version. O yes, I believed it all right as far as you are concerned. But you don't mean to tell me he's going to come out here, when there is a post between England and France, to carry a letter."

"To keep a promise."

"Promise be damned! And the sister? I suppose she came as excess luggage?"

He was silent while Catherine struggled with a laugh, then he burst out: "You needn't tell me! They came here to try and induce you to return to England with them: to take you away from the villain of the piece and re-establish you in the paths of virtue!"

Catherine had become suddenly grave again.

"Norman," she said, "you've always found me honourable, haven't you?"

Swaine grunted.

"That, I take it, is intended for acquiescence. Well, don't you realize that anyone attempting to induce me to leave you by underhand means would have very little chance of succeeding?"

Swaine seated himself upon the edge of the table and hunched his shoulders. "I'm not going to argue," he asserted. "You belong to me, and I'm not such a fool but I can look after my property."

Catherine's chin went up a little. "O no," she said quietly, "you are mistaken there. I belong to no one but myself."

Swaine sneered. "Such a discussion might have been profitable before you came out here with me," he said. "It's a bit out of date now."

Catherine grew a shade paler as she answered, "There also you are mistaken. It is by no means too late."

Swaine raised his head and laughed harshly.

"You are prepared to threaten," he said insolently. "On the strength of your recent legacy, I suppose!"

Surprise kept Catherine silent.

"Do the best you can for yourself and then, when opportunity offers, clear off," went on Norman. "It's the way of women."

Catherine found her voice. "It may be the way of some women," she said. "I am not in

a position to deny it ; but to think it of me no, Norman, you cannot believe so. I will discuss it with you. If all the money you have so generously lavished upon me during the past six months had been mine, and you penniless as I was when I came here with you, it would have made no difference ; you know it well. For when a woman joins her life to that of a man—O, even temporarily—it matters little who pays for the outing. I am my own keeper, Norman, and will remain so, even though the gowns I wear belong to you."

Norman had turned very red. He was pulling at the lid of the gilded basket, drawing strands of the brittle cane out from its border. After a moment he pushed the basket aside and stood up. "You are mine," he said thickly, "and I'll share you with no one."

Catherine made a gesture of resignation. "Have I asked you to do so?—and remember that you yourself——"

"I'm a man. The same law does not bind me."

Her lips set themselves. "The law of honourable behaviour binds us both equally," she said "or should do so. I, on my part, acknowledge the law and will abide by it."

Swaine laughed shortly. "Or I'll make you!" he said.

Catherine rose. She took her hat and scarf. "I left my mother's house because of a similar attitude on her part," was all she said as she went out of the room

Swaine remained where she had left him, his brows bent.

Mechanically he unfastened the gilt basket and began piling the little crystallized oranges on to the china bowl. He thought of Lily's words, "If she knew her own heart." Well, there was a plan open to him: he could ask her to marry him. He supposed that she set a value on the ceremony, and he shrugged his shoulders. It appeared that women did. "If she knew." Once married to him it did not matter what she knew. For he saw Catherine with Lily Carr's eyes sufficiently to know that if she promised "for better for worse" it would be so.

He set the last orange on the apex of the pyramid in the bowl and closed the empty basket. Then he lifted the bowl to carry it away. The force with which he had set it on the table had cracked it. It came apart in his hands.

CHAPTER VI

THE ROSE-COLOURED MASK

HENRI II, who was Monarch of Carnival year, arrived, according to the custom of vis to Nice, at the railway station about two o'clock in the afternoon. He was an enormous personage clad in pink satin, the feathers of whose were on a level with second-floor windows as he passed along the *Avenue de la Gare*, escorted by a long cavalcade of grotesqueries. His Majesty moved in a life-like fashion with the jolting of his equipage, and Catherine, seated in a window hired by Carr for their party, wondered at the strange attractiveness. The billowing pink of his satin garments, his trailing white feathers and the smile that was spread over his gargantuan features, like sun over a landscape, made an irresistible appeal to the imagination. He was followed close at heel by the larger cars; among them a delightful "Tartarin"—astride upon a lion, the crown of his head capped by a real spider: the whole fresh from a Paris atelier and executed with great spirit. This car was Catherine's favourite, but Lily preferred one representing the mythical "Michelin," an enormous creature in corrugated grey indiarubber, with

antics as he was drawn over the cobbled street, his rubber person jerked hither and thither by the motion, somehow caused Catherine to think of Norman, and then turn remorsefully to speak to him, just as he received a roll of serpentine hurled at his unmasked face by an attractive female, one of a number dressed in Eastern costume of yellows and reds, and standing on a high car marked *Maroquinerie*, from which they recklessly ladled confetti out of sacks on the heads of a defenceless crowd. Swaine replied to the missile by blowing a kiss, and Carr's serpentine having missed the vehicle altogether, he turned his attention to the groups of figures following the cars on foot. These groups appeared to Catherine even more interesting than the cars, and the antics of the "gourds of Cimiez" shared her preference with a collection of imitation street lamps curveting ludicrously in time to the strains of the Carnival March, proceeding from a band concealed in a mimic fort with swinging guns, from the muzzles of which confetti spurted as they swung. Lily exclaimed over a group of elongated maidens some ten feet high and clad in the height of fashion. She was soon tired of the rôle of spectator, however, and as Norman was in agreement with this sentiment, the whole party arrayed themselves in dominoes and masks, preparatory to following the tail of the procession along the crowded street towards the *Place Messina*.

The Carnival colours for the year were green

and yellow, and the two men wore emerald-saffron dominoes, while Lily's was of saffron colour and Catherine's of a deep orange. All four were closely hooded, the hoods being continuous with their dominoes and of the same colour and material as also were their bags for confetti; and each wore a black velvet mask covering the whole of the upper portion of the face.

They arranged that Norman should take charge of Lily, Carr of Catherine, and that they should all four meet again in an hour's time at a corner of the *Place* to discuss further arrangements.

Joining hands in Carnival fashion, they marched their way two by two into the street below, and were carried along by the vast crowd of holiday-makers that, laughing, singing, calling and jostling one another, pushed and pulled, danced and straggled towards the *Place*. Norman Swann and Lily soon outdistanced the other two, and as Catherine saw the emerald hood growing more distant she was guiltily conscious of a certain sense of freedom. Her discussion with Swann on the evening before and his demeanour towards herself had greatly perturbed her; and it was with a feeling of relief that she realized that the next hour at least she need have no conversation but with enjoyment.

As she had expected, Carr proved a most lightful cavalier. Holding her hand in friendly grasp, he piloted them through the crowd with considerable skill and infinite good-humour. He acceded to Catherine's slightest suggestion,

seemed to find a genuine pleasure in her good spirits, which in its turn enhanced her enjoyment.

Emerging from the *Avenue de la Gare*, the two made their way across the wide space of the *Place*, laughing and talking, calling upon one another to admire or be amused by this or that, and exchanging greetings and confetti with numerous kindred spirits as they went.

In the middle of the *Place* a band had begun to play for dancing, and here they drew up to watch the steps of two young French girls dressed as Pierrettes, who waltzed together in the centre of an admiring circle. A youth of the street-corner class, coming up beside Carr, seized a moment when the two were turning in proximity to hurl a handful of confetti into their faces, and the girls, stopping dizzily, turned upon Carr as the author of this attack and roundly abused him in voluble French. Carr, whose French was "not for idle markets," stood sheepishly silent, while the *gamin* who was the cause of the trouble cleared off doubled up with laughter.

"You might have defended me, Miss Catherine," Carr expostulated, when the girls, having expressed their feelings, circled away again. "And to pay for not doing so, you shall dance!" And he whirled her off, protesting with laughter against the roughness of the "floor" made for their feet by the roadway. They eddied to and fro amongst dancing couples till breath gave out, and came to a halt in the shade thrown by a neighbouring balcony. It was while they were

standing still for a moment, and Carr was complaining of the effects of dancing in a mask and under a hot sun, and mopping the exposed part of his face with his handkerchief, that Catherine noticed a girl on the far side of the ring of dancers who appeared to be regarding them intently from behind her rose-coloured velvet mask. She was a slight girl, wearing a pale green costume of some flimsy material which did not conceal her figure as a domino would have done, and something in the way she swung her confetti bag and fro in her right hand struck Catherine as familiar. She drew Carr a little away, and the girl's head turned, following their movement. Suddenly the memory of a silver chain-bag, swung in like manner to the confetti bag, seized Catherine. "Mr. Carr," she said, "I want you to leave here and walk away towards that side street, and when you have reached it, turn sharply and come back to me. Nonsense," as Carr protested, "it will only be a question of a few seconds. I will not move from this spot."

Carr hesitated, and then did as he was asked. Instantly the girl in the rose-coloured mask swerved aside and followed. Catherine smiled as she watched her go up to him and seem to speak. Carr made her some laughing answer and then turned to Catherine's side, leaving the girl standing at the corner of the street, down which she presently went.

"What mischief are you up to, Miss Catherine?" laughed Carr as he drew near. "The lady

green seems to take me for an acquaintance! She asked me to be at the same spot in an hour's time, and added that I was to come alone."

"Did you answer?"

"O yes; I agreed with alacrity, of course, and in the accepted Carnival squeak!"

There was a note of harshness in Catherine's laugh as she remarked, "She takes you for Norman."

"For Swaine?"

"Yes. You are very much alike in figure. The difference in height is not so noticeable when you are not together, and the domino makes everyone look taller."

"But who is she—and why——?"

Catherine made a quick gesture. "She is a friend of Norman's, Mr. Carr. And she must have been told he was wearing emerald satin and would be with an orange domino."

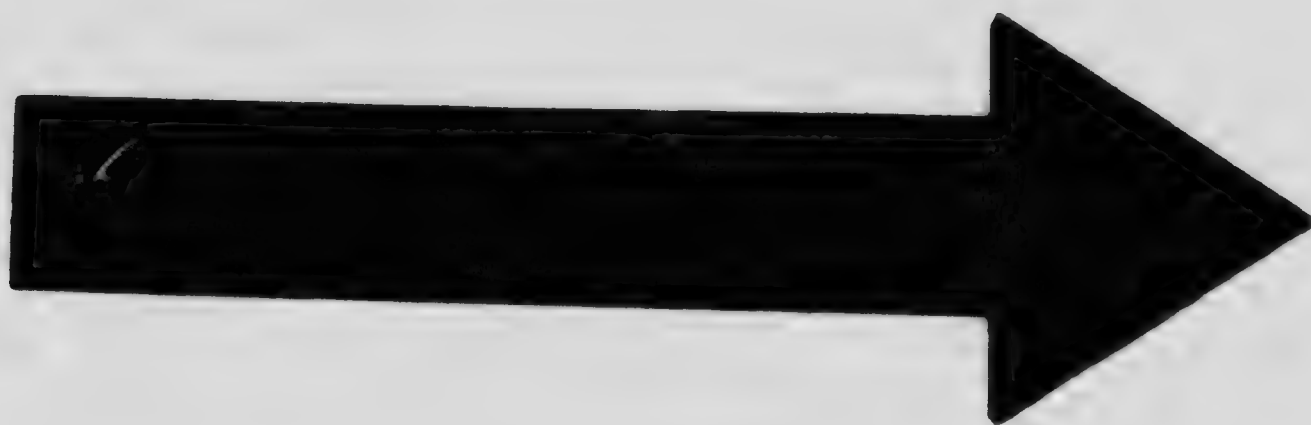
"But, my dear Miss Catherine——" Carr's voice was full of concern, and his eyes behind the mask regarded her anxiously.

"Never mind. It doesn't greatly matter; and soon it won't matter at all."

"Forgive me, it matters very much if you are being distressed."

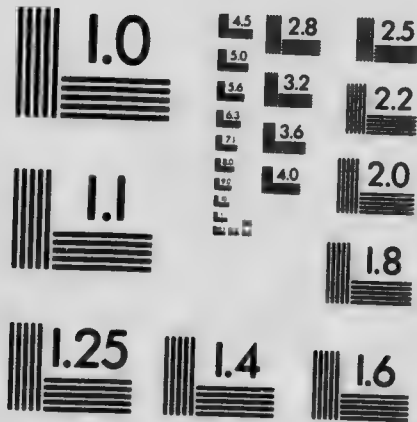
She laughed again, this time more softly, and put out her hand for his. "I am not distressed, *mon ami*," she answered; "I am merely speculative."

"The procession is coming round again," she added. "Let us go across; I want to gaze upon



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his majesty Henri II. I find him very alluring And don't let us mar Carnival with serious thoughts."

Hand in hand they moved away, and Carr's anxiety gradually disappeared under the influence of Catherine's gaiety.

Lily and Norman pushed their way through series of spirited adventures to where, at the far side of the *Place*, a stand had been erected. Here Norman stopped to light a cigarette, and Lily who was brushing confetti out of her hood, suddenly said, "Have you seen anything of Martine and his sister since your return?"

Swaine, who had with difficulty lighted a match, answered rather gruffly that they had met Martine last night in the *Gare*.

Lily noted the tone and her lips twitched. "They have taken a flat in the *Rue Balzac*," she said. "I met Mrs. Wilton yesterday; she looks as though they meant to stay on in Nice."

"Damn!" said Swaine, as a girl who was passing cleverly blew out the match. He caught the girl before she could make off and tried to kiss her, but she slipped from his grasp, and Swaine returned to Lily, who was laughing at his discomfiture.

"*Rue Balzac*, did you say?" he asked. "I wonder if they are out to-day."

"O yes; I asked Mrs. Wilton what they would be wearing, and she said blue. But we haven't

seen them, have we? There's very little blue about at all."

"Confound this mask," said Swaine. "I can't see over my own nose!" He pushed the *loup* up on to his forehead, leaving his face uncovered while he lighted his cigarette, and a girl who was passing caught sight of him and stopped in front of him, holding out a little bunch of violets.

"For me?" said Swaine, as he bent to look into her masked face.

The girl nodded and tried to move on, but Swaine followed and caught at her hand. "Tell me your name!" he begged; "do I know you?"

The girl shook her head and tried to withdraw her hand, but Swaine tightened his grasp and brought his face nearer hers. "Those are English eyes," he whispered. "It is an English name, I'm sure. Tell it me, that I may keep it with the violets."

The eyes behind the mask took on a wistful expression. "My name is Molly," she said softly. "Yours I know. It is Norman—Norman Swaine."

He still followed her. "How do you know?" he said; "it sounds delightful as you say it."

"I saw you at the *Sésame*—let me go."

She pulled her hand out of his, and as she broke away she looked back over her shoulder, and Swaine raised the violets to his lips.

Lily seemed rather irritable when he returned to her side.

"If you are playing fast and loose with every girl you see," she said, "I'll find another cavalier. I had as soon have a husband to look after me as you!"

Swaine laughed. "Don't be cross, Mrs. Lily!" he said. "Come across to the Monot and let us have an ice."

"There's wonderfully little blue about among all this colour," hazarded Swaine to Catherine an hour later as, Lily having appropriated Carr, they again moved off together.

Catherine gave him a keen look. "One would not expect much blue in a green and yellow Carnival," she replied.

"Everyone does not abide by the rules," Norman said meaningly.

"A great many do not," replied Catherine. "I saw a girl in a rose-coloured mask just now—the only one I have seen."

"Where?" asked Swaine with sudden interest.

Catherine smiled faintly to herself. "Over there," she said, "at the corner of the *Rue Balzac*. Let us go across and look for her."

They wound their way through the crowd, past ever fresh dancers, and Catherine pointed to where at the corner stood the girl, her rose-coloured mask turned expectantly, the bag swinging idly from her arm.

"Stay here for a minute, Kitty," Swaine said. "I shan't be gone for long."

Suddenly a wave of emotion swept over Cather-

ine's spirit. Tears rushed to her eyes; she stretched out her hand quickly and laid it on Swaine's arm. "Norman," she said, "don't go. Stay with me."

He stared in astonishment at her eyes, glittering behind the mask, and then jerked his arm sharply away. "I don't know what is the matter with you, Kitty," he said. "You never used to be emotional, and there is nothing to be afraid of. No one will interfere with you if you stay where you are, and I will be back in an instant."

He was gone without waiting for a reply, and Catherine stood very still where he had left her, conscious that she was afraid, though she knew that her fear was not of the crowd that danced and laughed about her.

A figure standing still and wearing a pensive air will, on a Carnival day, infallibly draw to itself the attention of its neighbours. Catherine was abruptly recalled from her reverie by a handful of confetti striking her on the side of the face, followed by an invocation to the dance from a sturdy male with the trouser of certain French regimentals protruding from under his lemon-coloured cotton domino. He did not wait for acquiescence, but seized her with good-natured violence and whirled her off. Catherine, whose English waltzing steps ill suited with his swinging French trot, was pushed and bumped into other dancers with uncomfortable roughness, and on reaching the outskirts of the surrounding ring struggled to be free. Annoyed by this persistence,

he tightened his grasp and a note of fear was creeping into Catherine's easy French when a man wearing a blue workman's blouse came suddenly from among the crowd where he had been watching the dance. Catherine's partner received a handful of confetti full in his open mouth, and amid the laughter and applause of the onlookers she was snatched away from him and borne off by the seeming workman. The soldier wiped the confetti from his mouth with his sleeve, and after one indignant glance in their direction shrugged with true French good-humour and turning, snatched up a laughing girl from the foremost of the spectators and whirled her away in turn.

Catherine clung to the shoulder of the blue smock and laughed contentedly as their steps fell into time. Martin steadied her with his arm and they waltzed together to where Norman and she had parted. There Martin stopped. "You are not alone?" he asked.

Catherine shook her head. "No," she said. "We were all together—the Carrs and ourselves. I mean—and Norman was with me just now but——" she hesitated, and made a weary gesture. "I lost him."

The last words fell upon Martin's ear with the dull note of actuality. "You are tired, are you not?" he asked.

"A little. We have been out since two, and Mr. Carr and I were dancing. It is hard work on this roadway."

She attempted to laugh, and turned her head to look down the side street where Norman had gone.

Martin glanced at his watch. "It is a quarter to four now," he remarked, "and I promised Clare to come in for tea at four. She went home a few minutes before I caught sight of you, to prepare it. Let me take you back with me to tea, Miss Arlsea. The flat is close here, in the *Rue Balzac*," he pointed to the street down which Swaine had gone. "A cup of tea and half an hour's rest will do you good."

Catherine hesitated. "Norman will come back here to look for me," she said.

"Then I will watch for his passing from the window, and I will come at intervals to look for him. In any case, I will not leave you till he returns, and I think you need a rest."

Catherine thought for a moment, then she appeared to make a decision. "Thank you," she said; "I will come."

CHAPTER VII

THE END OF CARNIVAL

THE din of Carnival died away as Martin closed the door of a tiny flat in the *Rue Balzac* behind them and called to Clare. "I have brought you a visitor," he said. "Come in, Miss Arlsea."

He stood aside and Catherine entered the small sitting-room. Clare Wilton, still wearing her blue Carnival dress and with the blue sun-bonnet that had done duty for a hood dangling behind her by its strings, came quickly forward from a tiny kitchen at the back of the flat. She held out both hands.

"I am very glad," she said.

Catherine stood still and gave her hand silently. She had suddenly realized that she was tired and that she must not trust herself to speak. She raised her left hand and removed her mask and Clare, after one glance at her face, turned and drew a low basket chair forward, saying, "Will you please excuse me while I get tea?"

Catherine, after a glance at Martin, who had installed himself at the window and was watching the street, sank into the chair offered and pushed back her hood.

She leant back in the chair and gazed about

the room. It was very simple. The walls were of a light slaty grey, the woodwork and floors a deep chocolate colour, varnished brightly. There were dark blue rugs about the floor, and the curtains, tablecloth and chair-covers were all of the same shade of electric-blue casement cloth and deftly embroidered in darker shades. There were no pictures on the walls, but a series of glazed delf plates and saucers, painted roughly and gaudily with deep blue conventional flowers and leaves. On the table was a single bowl of similar ware, full of violets, the scent from which filled the room, and brought instantly before Catherine's mind the scene at the flower-market when she had found the dead blackbird.

Down this by-street the clamour of Carnival was hushed to faintness. Only the sound of the band still playing the waltz to which Martin and she had danced fell upon Catherine's ears.

Martin remained standing by the window. It was good that he was there, Catherine thought contentedly, and she wondered what Norman would say, and told herself "It doesn't matter—now."

Her eyes closed in a kind of dreamy content, and Clare, returning from the kitchen with the tray, paused for a second to look at her. Her head, freed from the hood, was resting against the blue of the chair-back, and the brown waving hair fell in some disorder across her forehead. One hand, holding the black velvet mask, hung listlessly over the arm of the chair, and all about

her limbs the satin folds of the domino fell long lines of vivid orange.

She moved as Clare entered, and opened her eyes. "You are very kind to let me rest here, Mrs. Weston," she said. "Carnival is certainly fatiguing."

"But very entertaining don't you think?" replied Clare as she moved about the table. "And I never saw anything so fascinating as the great figures!"

"Yes, are they not? I can't think why they should be so."

"Perhaps because 'there were giants in those days,'" said Martin, coming from the window. "The days when the race was young, I mean. We all love tales of giants."

Catherine, who seemed to find this suggestion of interest, was recalled by Clare's asking to remove her domino. She stood up and Martin took it from her shoulders: as he did so, it occurred strangely to Catherine that the dress she was wearing was the one in which she had left her mother's house seven months before. She had chosen it that day because it was old and used and therefore suitable to the rigours of Carnival.

She fell silent at the memory, and Clare, seeing that she was disinclined to talk, chatted with Martin and laughed to Hugh over the teacups concerning the day's adventures.

When tea was over, Martin donned his mask and went out again to look for Swaine at the street corner and Catherine sat on talking to Clare. "How well your dress matches

curtains," she said, smiling; "I believe it is made of the same material!"

Clare laughed. "It is," she answered. "I had a lot over. Don't you like my wall decoration, Miss Arlsea? I bought the delf in the market for '*deux sous la pièce*.'"

"I like it all," Catherine said. "More than I can say."

Clare thought she seemed unhappy. She began speaking about their plans, and told Catherine they thought of going to live at Mentone for a time, later on. Hugh, she said, had begun a new play. "For of course you know that his last one—'The Yellow Slipper'—was accepted; it will be produced in London in the autumn."

Catherine raised her head. "No, I did not know. Mr. Martin cannot have told Norman in his letters."

Clare thought he probably had done so, but the fact had not struck Swaine as worth his remembrance. She spoke of Martin's work and plans, and expressed interest when Catherine told her that she also was employing herself at writing.

Suddenly, after a pause in the conversation, Clare asked if Catherine had received any home news other than she had herself reported, and Catherine told her that she had no other correspondent, so that all news had ceased when Clare left England.

Mrs. Wilton was silent for some moments. Then she said, "In that case you may not know that Mrs. Arlsea has married again."

She looked at Catherine's face as she spoke,

and then turned a little away. "She married Mr. England—the Hon. George England; he the youngest son of Lord Exe. Quite a young man and I believe very handsome." She paused as though choosing her words. "I hear from Mrs. Conway that his people made a fuss," she said; "but they are becoming reconciled to the match, and Mrs. England and her husband are now staying with them at Exe Hall, in Berkshire."

Catherine rose from the table and crossed the window, where she stood looking out. Old memories came surging in upon her: not, Mrs. Wilton supposed, the memories of her life in London; but of Mortham.

The room in which she stood, the movement in the street below and its sounds of mirth, grew dim and distant to her senses, and their place were taken by forms and figures from the past. She saw again in fancy her father's face and a tall figure coming towards her in the sunlit garden.

All at once she raised her head: it seemed to her that the burden of the years had fallen from her shoulders and rolled away.

Clare Wilton rose, and softly putting together the tea-things, carried them out of the room as Martin returned to it from the street. "I find no one whom I can recognize as Swaine," he told Catherine. "There is a man in a green satin domino near the corner, but it is not Swaine. I heard him call out to some one, and it was Swaine's voice."

Catherine did not seem to have heard

She left the window and came over to the table, and seating herself, leaned her arms across it. "Your sister tells me my mother has remarried," she said.

Martin sat down on the farther side of the table, silently regarding her.

"That," said Catherine, "is the end of the old life." She rose again and went and stood by the mantelpiece. "Some day, if you will let me, I will tell you of my father," she said softly. "His love was everything I had. But I had to share it with her." She stopped, and Martin waited in troubled silence.

Catherine turned and faced him; she spoke with the air of one making a confession. "Once I hated her. But now—now that she has given him back to me—that hatred is a burden that I need carry no longer." She moved suddenly to where her orange domino lay across the chair-back and took it up.

"I must find Norman," she said. "I have something to say to him."

Martin rose, and he took the domino from her and helped her into it. Then he called Clare, saying, "We will both go with you."

She made no protest, and all three went down again into the street.

The sun was setting, and its red rays touched the fruits of the palm-trees to bronze and laid themselves lovingly on the pink-satin doublet of Henri II, housed for the night under his canopy in the *Place Messina*. The streets were thinning

fast ; only the more ardent spirits still laughed and danced and fought mimic battles in the roadway.

As the three emerged from the *Rue Balz* Martin pointed out a green-satin domino. "is the man I told you of," he said. "But he is not Swaine, though he is like him in figure."

Catherine let go of Clare's arm and took a step forward. "No, it is not Norman," she replied. "it is Mr. Carr."

Carr was moving restlessly up and down, glancing this way and that, and when he caught sight of Catherine he sprang to meet her. "O, you have come at last!" he said in tones of relief. "Thank goodness! I don't know when I have been so worried. Where——" He stopped and saw Martin and Mrs. Wilton, and Catherine introduced them. Both men unmasked, and Carr explained that they had met Catherine taken her home with them to tea. Carr seemed to experience further relief. "Swaine has been searching half Nice," he said. "I was keeping guard here while he takes Lily back to your home. He will be very grateful to you, Mrs. Wilton."

Clare grimaced behind her mask and bowed gravely.

"We will leave you now in Mr. Carr's charge, Miss Arlsea," he said, and Catherine put her hand. "May I come again soon?" she asked Clare, and there was a note in her voice like that of a pleading child.

Clare put her arm about the tall figure. "dear," she said, "of course."

"Great Scott, Miss Catherine," said Carr, mopping his face and letting down his mask, "you have given us all a hunt. How did you get separated from Swaine?"

Catherine took his offered arm. "You'd better ask Norman that," she said.

"I did," replied Carr naïvely; "but he only swore at me. He said he had left you to go and speak to some one, and that when he returned in five minutes you were gone."

Catherine laughed. "He followed the rose-coloured mask! And then Mr. Martin found me, and I danced with him and they asked me in to tea. I'm ever so sorry you've been anxious," she added remorsefully. "If I'd thought of your being dragged about after me I wouldn't have done it."

Carr wondered what to make of this information, and while he was turning the matter over in his mind the boom of a distant gun fell on their ears.

Instantly the din in the street became quieter. The band in the *Place* played a few concluding bars and came to an end. People ceased to throw confetti. A group of youths passing and singing a French street-song stopped and the melody trailed away into silence. A man near scrambled out of his domino, rolled it into a ball and tucked it under his arm.

Catherine raised her hand and removed the black velvet mask.

"Carnival is over," she said.

CHAPTER VIII

A PROPOSAL

NORMAN SWAINE was angry. He stood with back to the mantelpiece and bit the end of cigarette. The Carrs had remained to dinner, and the conversation had been of Carnival adventures and Carnival jests. It was perhaps some indefinite suggestion in Herbert Carr's manner that made Swaine feel the necessity for self-defence, and when the Carrs had left early for the flat where they were spending the festival weeks in Nice, he joined Catherine in her own small sitting-room and opened an attack upon her by demanding an account of her proceedings during his absence that afternoon. Catherine did not at first seem disposed to meet his questioning with her usual frankness. She remarked, not without sarcasm, that it might be as pertinent that he should give an account of his chase of the rose-coloured mask.

Swaine brushed the suggestion aside, remarking that it was not a time for foolery.

An inflexion in Catherine's tone, when he replied that it certainly was not, threw him back on the possible consequence of his own neglect and set him upon the defensive again. He

marked that Catherine had not remained at her post, and drew her attention to the fact that an hour or more had elapsed between the time when he had left her and Carr's eventually finding her there.

Catherine replied that she had accounted for her movements to Carr, and to Norman's indignant exclamation added: "I think he had the best right to an explanation, seeing that it was he, and not you, who waited for me."

Swaine felt that he was being played with. He ceased to act on the defensive and became annoyed. "I asked you to wait for a few moments——" he said.

"While you followed the rose-coloured mask!"

"The rose-coloured mask has nothing to do with the question of where you went to."

"On the contrary," Catherine replied, "its wearer was the cause of the whole incident; but for her I should never have been alone at all. She asked you to meet her——"

"Nonsense, Kitty, you're jealous; and you are mistaken too."

"O no, I'm not. She asked you to meet her at the corner of the *Rue Balzac*, and alone."

Swaine laughed. "This is sheer invention," he said.

"O no, it isn't. It's exactly what took place. Only unfortunately she asked Herbert Carr instead of you!"

"Carr?"

"Yes. You see, your dominoes were alike and

you are much of a size. I was with Mr. Carr when he received the invitation."

Swaine heard this news in nonplussed silence and looking at his face, Catherine laughed suddenly. "You see you have reason to be grateful to Norman," she said mockingly. "I kept your appointment for you. The lady was apparently in possession of information as to your dress, probably my own also. She has, by the way, a graceful figure and a trick of swinging a fan. Only, last time I saw her it was a silver one."

Norman swore.

"I thought," continued Catherine, "that it would be a pity to disappoint her, so I told you about the rose-coloured mask. It seemed to interest you."

Swaine moved to flick the ash from his cigarette into the grate and remained for a moment with his back turned.

Catherine lifted a scrap of embroidery from the table and began to sew at its blue curves. At once she laid it down again in her lap. "Norman," she said, "I asked you to stay with me and you would not. Now listen, and I will tell you exactly what occurred." She then told him an account of all the incidents that had taken place, from the moment when the soldier seized her until her meeting with Herbert an hour later.

When she had finished, Swaine left the table and swung himself on to the sofa. "Let us come to an understanding, Kitty," he

"You appear to me to have become discontented with your position. I presume it would be a satisfaction to you to have it legalized. We had better be married."

Catherine gazed at him in stupefied silence.

"I have to be back in London next month, as you know," Swaine went on. "We can be married either here or in Paris and return to England as man and wife."

She found her voice. "I am awfully sorry you should feel you have to propose this, Norman," she said with heightened colour.

Swaine raised his shoulders. "Well," he answered, "I admit it's not what I had contemplated; but if it gives you any satisfaction——"

"But it gives me no satisfaction. Far from it." Catherine was trembling a little and spoke painfully.

Swaine stared at her flushed face uncomprehendingly.

She rose from her chair and crossed the room to the door. Then she turned and came back.

"You will realize how distressing your proposition is to me," she said, "when I tell you that this afternoon I determined that I could not return to England with you."

Swaine laughed easily. "I admit you may have had some slight cause for jealousy, but you now see that it was groundless."

A sudden irritability at his obstinacy seized Catherine. "Would the legal formality prevent

a repetition of the Carlton episode?" she asked drily.

Swaine jerked his foot impatiently. "I offer you marriage," he said.

"I thank you," replied Catherine, "and I must refuse your offer."

Swaine stopped swinging his foot. He stared incredulously at her. "Do you know what you are saying?" he asked.

Catherine smiled. She returned to her chair and took up the bit of embroidery again. "Of course, yes," she said, "I know very well. I am committing what most people would consider an incredibly foolish action."

"And well they might! You cannot mean it, Kitty."

"I do mean it, nevertheless."

"But why—what reason can you give?"

"Is a reason necessary? It is surely sufficient that while I am grateful for your offer I do not wish to marry you."

"But in your position——"

She made a little movement. "That is hard, generous, Norman," she protested. "Whatever the world may have to say of my conduct, you at least have nothing to reproach me with."

"And with what do you reproach me?"

She shook her head. "With nothing that you can help. You have given me gowns and jewels and luxury—all, in fact, that you have to give. And more than that, you have taught me how to face life."

"And in spite of this——"

"And in spite of all this I cannot marry you. And I regret if it pains you that I should refuse. But I feel that the man I could marry must be able to give me more than these things."

Swaine broke suddenly into harsh laughter. "The man you would marry!" he echoed.

Catherine coloured again, but she held her head erect. "It is not fitting that you should insult me," she said quietly; "for I at least have been faithful to our compact."

Swaine sprang from his perch on the table and walked over to the fire-place, where he swung round on her. "Do you realize," he demanded, "that there are half a dozen women who would leave Nice with me to-morrow?"

"I realize it perfectly—Miss Carlton——"

"Bah! Edna Carlton! There is a girl at the *Sésame* to whom I have only spoken once. She is a lady of education, like yourself. She would need no second invitation."

Catherine put her hand wearily to her head. "I can only wish you happiness," she said, "and I believe my refusal to marry you will make for your well-being. For I don't think we are suited to one another as husband and wife."

Swaine had gone very white. He came and stood over her, his eyes glowing. "You think you have found some one who is suitable, don't you?" he said. "But Hugh Martin will have to reckon with me first."

He turned and walked out of the room.

Catherine sat still looking down at the embroidery lying on her lap. She put out her finger and touched the shaded blue flowers timidly. "Hugh Martin," how strange! And how very strange that Norman Swaine of all people should make her aware of something in her own heart, something she should have realized for herself.

For a while she sat still, her eyes on the embroidered blossoms, her thoughts in the blue curtained room in the *Rue Balzac*.

Presently she rose, and folding the work, laid it aside and stood considering her position. On no person could and would help her—Herbert Carr. He was a sound man and a loyal friend. He would be able to deal with Swaine. She decided to take some things and go round to the villa in the *Rue Gonoud* at once. They would put her up for the night and she could ask Carr to see Swaine to-morrow.

CHAPTER IX

MARTIN OPENS A DRAWER

WHEN Swaine arrived at the flat in the *Rue Balzac* half an hour later, Martin guessed that he had come upon no friendly errand and asked his sister to leave them alone together. Clare, after one anxious look at her brother, took up her book and left the room.

Having opened the door for her to pass out, Martin closed it behind her and returned to his chair, whilst Swaine seated himself in his favourite attitude on the table and lost no time in coming to the point.

"I've come here to-night to request you to leave Nice," he said.

Martin raised his brows and rejoined, "Indeed! Is that so?"

Swaine thrust his hands determinedly into the pockets of his coat. "I think you ought to know me by this time," he remarked.

"I believe I should!"

"Yet you don't seem to realize that I am the last man in the world to stand any interference with my rights—especially where a woman is concerned."

"Is there any particular reason why I should be expected to realize it?"

Swaine ignored the question. "I can remind you," he went on, "of the occasion upon which Carr began paying attentions to Daisy Farrell if you have forgotten the affair."

"I remember it perfectly," replied Martin.

"Perhaps you also remember that, thanks to my action in the matter, Miss Daisy found herself left in the lurch."

"Is the episode one which you continue to regard as reflecting credit upon yourself, Swaine?"

"Certainly it is. I knew what I wanted to accomplish and I carried out my plan."

"I was sorry for the girl and I considered her ill-used," Martin said quietly. "Is there any object in stirring up these reminiscences?"

"Yes, there is."

Martin lifted his shoulders a little. He leaned back in his chair and, taking out a pipe, began to fill it.

"You came out to Nice in order to induce Miss Arlsea to leave me," Swaine asserted.

"Did I? Yes. I believe you told me so before. What if I did?"

"I am very determined that you shall not succeed in your design."

"This also you told me before."

"I now tell you again. I will not stand interference with my rights from you, any more than I did in the case of Carr and Daisy Farrell."

Martin lighted his pipe. "The period of slave-ownership is past, I believe," he remarked.

"Quite so. There are still poachers left in the world, however, and I know of two ways of dealing with them. One is in a court of law; the other is by physical persuasion."

"The law will not admit your proprietorship."

"As affairs stand, no. But if Catherine marries me——"

"She will not marry you."

Swaine glared. "And pray how do you know that?" he asked indignantly.

Martin made a nonchalant gesture. "You left her alone in the street to-day," he said. "It was in effect for the last time."

"So she told you that, did she?" Swaine threw back his head and spoke through half-closed lips.

"Miss Arlsea told me nothing. But I am certain she will never become your wife; therefore you can make no use of the law." Martin took his pipe from his lips and pushed down the contents with his finger. "You had better get on with the physical violence," he suggested. "How do you propose to tackle the job? Shall we fight a duel? I believe I am a good shot. Or will you hire ruffians to waylay me in the street as being safer?"

Swaine took his fists out of his pockets and clenched them. "You will perhaps find that I am pretty able-bodied," he said.

Martin looked him over. "You are more

able in body than in mind. Come, Swaine, you are making yourself ridiculous. What do you expect to gain by these monkey-tricks?"

The red gleam was in Swaine's eyes as he replied: "I'm going to gain Catherine Arlsea and keep her."

"How? By murdering me? It seems a odd scheme by which to make a bid for a woman's favour, especially such a woman as Miss Arlsea. However," he added, "I am indebted to you for the warning. I can now take steps to frustrate your kindly intentions."

Swaine got off the table suddenly. "By what method do you propose doing that?" he asked with a sneer.

"Well," replied Martin, who had not moved, "there are, as you pointed out just now, two methods of procedure. I can have recourse to the law, as you have used threats of violence, or we can resort to the more effective, if somewhat melodramatic, methods of Drury Lane. I always keep a revolver amongst my belongings. It was once the property of my father. He was an Irishman and lived in turbulent times. He taught me the use of the weapon when I was a lad, and I believe I am quite capable of defending myself."

Swaine gave vent to an oath. He took a step forward. "I suppose you think you can puzzle me with this swashbuckling talk, and so postpone the affair to some indefinite date."

Martin laid his pipe upon the table.

"You imagine me to be a fool, don't you?" he said. His tone had changed and there was a look on his face that Swaine had never seen there before. "You think because I am quiet that I am also 'soft,'" he went on. "Well, try me!" He threw back the blue tablecloth and pulled out a drawer. Over the edge of the table Swaine caught the gleam of steel. He stood quite silent, the red glow still in his eyes.

Martin took his hands away from the drawer, leaving it open, and leaned back in his chair.

"Produce your weapon," he said.

Swaine made no motion. "Do you think I will trouble about fire-arms?" he asked; "my fists are weapon enough for use against an Irish cur like you."

Martin's eyes flashed. "I am a Celt," he said; "in fact, as you remark, Irish; and no Irishman takes a threat with complacency. You come here and threaten me with violence. You perceive I am prepared to defend myself, and you can now take what course you please. But first let us understand one another. I came out here to be a friend to Miss Arlsea, should she desire my friendship, and I will remain near her until she tells me that she has no use for my presence. The day she tells me to leave Nice I will go; but she shall decide and she alone. I promised Conway a year ago that I would remain her friend."

He paused, but Swaine did not take the opportunity offered him for speech. He had gripped the back of a chair and stood biting his lip.

Martin went on after a moment: "Do you think when I had the courage to see the girl I loved—whom Conway and I both loved—you needn't sneer. Conway's hand is helpful now, but mine is not—do you think when I was brave enough to stand aside and suffer, and see her linked to you in your unworthiness, that I will fear now, because you are pleased to threaten me with physical violence—fear my own paltry skin! Norman Swaine, you are a fool!"

He stopped, and with a gesture of contempt closed the drawer and replaced the tablecloth.

Swaine found his voice. "I've done very well for Catherine Arlsea," he said doggedly. "She has got nothing to complain of."

"What have you done for her? O you fool," as Swaine was about to reply, "I know what you are going to say. You have given her gowns and jewels, as you would any girl of the streets who happened to catch your fancy. But what have you done with her spirit? How much do you know of the real Catherine Arlsea? So little that you actually think to gain her favour by an appeal to violence. A game for dogs and wolves and monkeys: to fight for their mates with teeth and claw. But to propose such a scheme to gain the favour of a sensitive woman and persuade her into marrying you—Norman Swaine, I repeat, you are a fool."

Swaine turned, and the light glinted on his uncovered teeth. "I've had enough of you."

ranting," he said. "I'll leave you to your ravings."

"Yes, go. And go back to London to the stage and rehearse your part; and see that you get it going better than you do the real thing, or it won't be much of a success."

At the door Swaine turned: "If ever I get the chance——"

"You won't. And if you did, you'd only make a muck of things again, as you have done to-night. You can't hope to deal with any man till you have understood something of his character, and to do that you must set aside a little of your own egotism and study him. Good-night."

Clare Wilton heard the outer door bang and came into the sitting-room, where she found Hugh standing by the table. He looked up as she entered and their eyes met.

"I'm sorry, Clare, that I had to ask you to turn out," Martin said; "but it wasn't a job for three."

Clare came nearer and lifted a very anxious face to his. "What has happened, Hugh?" she asked.

Martin took up his pipe from the table and, crossing to the fire-place, rapped it on the tiles to empty it.

"O, it's all right. He was getting a bit outside himself." He put the pipe on the mantelshelf and turned to her again. "It doesn't matter a

farthing about that. The thing that troubles me is about Miss Arlsea. I can't guess exactly what has happened."

"Have they disagreed?"

"That's just what I don't know; but something must have taken place since this afternoon. I expect he cut up rough about her coming here to tea."

Clare, who had seated herself by the table, looked anxious.

"Did we do wrongly in bringing her here?" she asked.

"No. I think not. There was bound to be an end to it, Clare, and the sooner they understand one another the better. The most you and I can have done is to have hastened matters."

Clare was silent, considering the question. Then she said: "I had better go round to Carrs' villa to-morrow and see if they have any news. It is lucky I have their address."

CHAPTER X

CLARE TAKES HER STAND

ON the following afternoon, however, just as Clare Wilton was dressing to go round to the *Rue Gonoud*, Mrs. Carr was announced.

Clare, entering the sitting-room, found her seated in one of the blue-covered basket chairs and talking to Martin.

"I have something to say to you, Mrs. Wilton," she began, when they had shaken hands. "Do you think you could ask your brother to go out?"

Martin laughed. "I could go without waiting to be asked," he said. "May I return in time for tea?"

"O, by all means. That will give me quite an hour, won't it? Thank you so much!"

Martin left the room, and Lily accepted Clare's offer of a cigarette with a nod of thanks.

Clare held a lighted match for her, threw it into the fire-place, and waited for Lily to speak.

Lily puffed hard for a second or two; then she took the cigarette from between her lips and moistened the end. "Catherine Arlsea left Norman Swaine last night," she said.

"O Mrs. Carr! Where is she?"

"With us at the villa in the *Rue Gonoud*,"

Lily replied, and returned the cigarette to the corner of her mouth.

Clare gave a gasp of relief. She drew a chair and sat down opposite Lily.

"Tell me about it, please," she said. "I am very much Miss Arlsea's friend."

Lily crossed her legs, and leaning forward, clasped her knee with her hands. "Last night Swaine asked Kitty to marry him and she refused."

"Thank goodness!"

Lily nodded. "I'm with you there. As a lover, I admit, Swaine has his attractions, but as a husband—the saints defend us!"

"However, of course he began cutting her rough, and though I don't know precisely what he said or did, Kitty came round to us about ten o'clock and asked us to take her in for the night. I couldn't get any details out of her, only the bare facts, and that she'd parted with Norman and was not going back. So I left her to talk to my husband while I got a room ready for her, and between them they fixed it up so that Herbert should go round and see Swaine the first thing this morning."

"Was Miss Arlsea very unhappy?"

"She was very anxious. I gathered from what little she did say that Swaine had made some vague threat against your brother. Rightly or wrongly, he suspected Mr. Martin to be at the bottom of Kitty's rejection of his offer of marriage. That, you probably know the truth of better than I do."

Lily leaned back in her chair and waited for Clare to speak.

"Mr. Swaine came here last night," Clare said after a moment's consideration.

Lily pricked up her ears. "O, he did, did he? Any bones broken?"

Clare Wilton looked up sharply. "In common with a good many other people you misjudge my brother, Mrs. Carr," she said. "Believe me, he is quite capable of protecting himself!"

Lily shrugged her shoulders almost imperceptibly. "I thought it might be a case of 'coffee for one,'" she said with a shade of impertinence. "What a merciful escape!"

"For Mr. Swaine. Yes." Clare's tone was final, and she threw her half-smoked cigarette into the grate. "Please tell me about Miss Arlsea," she said.

Lily, after regarding her quizzically for a moment, continued: "Herbert went round to the hotel early this morning and caught Swaine before he went out. It seems he was in an awful rage, because he thought Kitty might be here with you. He calmed down a little when Herbert told him she was at the villa with us, and declared his intention of coming to fetch her away. Herbert, however, flatly informed him that he should do no such thing, and that while Kitty chose to remain under our roof she should suffer no kind of persecution, either from him or anyone else. Of course, Swaine started to make a row, but Herbert was quite equal to him. He is not a

showy person, Mrs. Wilton, but he is straight and loyal, and he is very sincerely Kitty's friend."

Lily spoke with unusual earnestness, and Clare nodded appreciatively.

"He told Swaine all about himself and a bit over," Lily continued with a laugh. "And I pointed out that Catherine had honestly kept to her part of the bargain and that Swaine had no cause to complain of her leaving him now. In fact, he told him that the cause for complaint was all the other way. It seems there is a girl here in Nice whom he has been running after; though how Herbert found it out I don't know, as we've only been here a few days. Any way, after a lot of hectoring on Herbert's part, Swaine admitted that Kitty might have had some cause for complaint, though of course he blamed the girl."

Mrs. Wilton's lip curled. "They always do," she said.

Lily flicked the ash from her cigarette. "Swaine has got one and half a dozen of the other. However, Swaine was so far subdued that he listened when Herbert pointed out to him that it was no use his pestering Catherine to return to him, because when once she had made up her mind on the subject nothing would ever induce her to go back on her decision."

She paused again, and Clare waited in silence.

"They talked and argued for nearly two hours, and of course I can't tell you half Herbert said, because I don't know it, and most likely it's

great loss! Anyhow, in the end Swaine seemed to realize the truth of what was said about Kitty's not going back on her decision. Herbert admitted to me that he couldn't help feeling a bit sorry for him, in spite of his behaviour. He says he believes Swaine cared as much about Kitty Arlsea as he is capable of caring for anyone, and was evidently genuinely hard hit at losing her. It seems he spoke of her dresses and things, all of which were left at the hotel, and asked Herbert if he thought she could be induced to receive them, and Herbert promised to persuade her to do so. After that Swaine was rather quiet, and he said he should carry out his plans and leave next week for Paris, as he had originally intended.

"It ended by his offering Herbert a drink, which he accepted, and they parted very good friends."

Clare drew a long breath. "It must have been a terrible evening yesterday for Miss Arlsea," she said.

"She has not complained," Lily replied; "and while my husband was out this morning she busied herself with her writing. You know, perhaps, that she has been doing a good deal in that way—little dramatic sketches for Swaine to act in, and so forth—and she says that now she will take to literature seriously as a settled occupation.

"The thing is, where is she going to live? She tells me her mother is remarried."

"Yes," said Clare. "It was I who told her that."

Lily nodded. "Not that they could ever come together again, in any case. Mrs. Arlsea is one of those women who think the gods gave them a monopoly of the virtues and sent everybody else into the world to test those virtues to the uttermost. It has apparently never occurred to her that the catastrophe of Kitty's running away from home could by any possibility be laid to her charge."

Clare Wilton looked up quickly. "Perhaps it was not such a catastrophe after all, Mrs. Carr," she suggested.

Lily flashed her a glance. "That's just what I told Herbert. He was cursing Swaine up hill and down dale, and I pointed out to him that perhaps Swaine had done better for Catherine Arlsea than he guessed. Of course, the potentiality was there: we all know that. You can't develop what's not in a person; but no one knowing Kitty Arlsea as she was in the old days and then seeing her again as she now is could help acknowledging her development—provided they spoke honestly."

"That's just the trouble," answered Clare. "So few people are honest. The great majority of people are just conventional hypocrites."

Lily regarded her quizzically. "Your own sincerity is about to be tested, Mrs. Wilton!" she said bluntly. "I take it you'll stand by Kitty now?"

Clare smiled. "Yes," she replied. "You may take it so."

Lily nodded approval. "The question is what is she going to do," she repeated. "She will of course remain with us until we leave Nice. But we must leave in a week or two. Herbert can't neglect his business much longer. We will take her with us willingly, if she will go; but I think she won't."

"No," interrupted Clare. "She would not wish to return to London at present, I feel sure."

There was silence while Lily relighted her cigarette.

"If you will permit me, I will come to see Miss Arlsea at once, Mrs. Carr," said Clare suddenly.

"Yes, of course, Mrs. Wilton. I hoped you would do so."

"And perhaps when we have talked things over I can persuade her to join me in the flat I am taking at Mentone. Hugh is obliged to return to England for some time, in order to superintend the production of his play 'The Yellow Slipper,' which is coming on in the early summer, and I had planned to live out here till his return."

Lily's face expressed satisfaction. "Kitty loved Mentone when we were there together," she remarked. "She said at the time how much she preferred it to Nice. I believe she would agree, Mrs. Wilton; at any rate, till something turned up."

CHAPTER XI

THE BROKEN FAN

THE year that followed was a strenuous one for Hugh Martin. He had left Nice and returned to London, where the business consequent upon the signing of the contract and the rehearsals of the new play awaited him.

In London, however, he found an unexpected state of affairs that seemed likely to detain him there for some considerable time. An irregularity in the contract led to a rupture of relations with the actor-manager at whose theatre 'The Yellow Slipper' was to have been produced, and Martin traced this irregularity to an unscrupulous theatrical agent, behind whom, guessing at a personal enmity, he eventually unmasked Norman Swaine. Swaine promptly threatened Martin with a legal action, and a good deal of legal correspondence ensued, and it was only with the departure of Swaine on his American tour that, his active malice having been removed, things began to right themselves.

Martin had resolved to remain in London until all details connected with the affair were finally settled, and consequently more than a year elapsed before his return to France. Seated in the train that was taking him towards Menton

he was thinking over the events that had occurred and of the satisfactory reception that had been given to the play on the first night of its production, which had taken place in London during the preceding week.

As the train neared the Mediterranean coast his thoughts turned towards his sister and Catherine. The latter had written a novel, the manuscript of which had been revised by Martin and by him submitted to an English publisher. He carried with him in his pocket the formal acceptance of the book by this firm. It had pleased him to bring it to Mentone in person, for he knew that it meant much to Catherine.

He looked out of the window at the white-walled villas and over the hedgeless fields of Southern France, and thought of her as her letters and Clare's had pictured her for him.

There had been content in these letters of Catherine's and a certain interest in her chosen occupation; yet in spite of this Martin seemed always to see her as he had parted from her more than a year ago at the station in Nice: very silent and with wistful eyes.

The same look was in Catherine's eyes at that moment as she stood before the mirror in her room in the villa at Mentone. She had put on a pale grey muslin, very plain and simple, and she now thought that it needed some kind of ornament. She wished that she had bought a bunch of violets, and wondered if there would be time

to go out and get them before Martin's arrival. Then she bethought herself of a certain brooch, a large pink cameo that had belonged to Robert Arlsea's mother, and which she knew lay with other of her former possessions at the bottom of one of the trunks that Swaine had forwarded from the hotel at Nice, and neither of which she had ever opened.

She went to the corner of the room where the trunks stood, hesitated for a moment, and then dragged the smaller of the two forward to the light of the window, unlocked it, and threw back the lid.

Her gowns had been pushed clumsily into the trunk box by Swaine, and Catherine pulled them out one by one and threw them across the open back of the trunk, where they sprawled forlornly, their brightly coloured materials wrinkled into a thousand creases, their embroideries frayed, and the gold threads running through their patterns tarnished. From the bottom of the trunk Catherine drew a cardboard box, and, still kneeling, proceeded to open it and unwrap the trinkets contained in it. She found the cameo and was about to cover the box, when her eye was caught by an unremembered packet lying at the bottom. She lifted the parcel and unwrapped the package. Inside, its fragile sticks disjointed, the pattern tracery of its pattern broken away, she found them, lay the ivory fan that Swaine had brought to the house in Gloucester Road nearly ten years ago.

Catherine lifted it out of its wrappings, and

turned it over and looked at the faded writing on one of its sticks. Her thoughts went back to the play in which Swaine had been acting when he had sent the fan, and in which it had figured as the symbol of conventionality.

Well, the fan was broken now.

She folded it quickly together and put it back into the bottom of the trunk. Then she bundled all the dresses pell-mell in upon it, pushed the trunk back into its corner and turned away to the window.

The sun was sinking behind the palms in the gardens opposite; from a monastery on a hill behind the villa came the sound of a tolling bell. Catherine took up the cameo from the chair where she had laid it, and she went back to the mirror and began to fasten the ornament among the laces at her throat.

The silver globe of the moon hung low over the waters of the Mediterranean and flung a ladder of light across them to the gleaming harbour wall. From the monastery on the hill-side the light of a lantern shone steadily; the scent of lemons was in the evening air.

Hugh Martin and Catherine Arlsea were seated at a little table outside an unpretentious café near the sea.

The two had been discussing Martin's play over their coffee-cups and the chances of success for Catherine's novel. They had spoken, too, of Lily and Carr and of Mrs. Conway, whom Martin

had seen a good deal of, and who sent many messages to Catherine.

Then a silence fell between them, and Catherine's gaze wandered to where, within the encircling wall of the harbour, little lights, yellow, red and green, swayed and bobbed upon the restless waters.

Martin's eye dwelt lingeringly on her profile, as though he satisfied a long felt need. At intervals people entered or left the café, and presently a woman wearing an extravagant hat came and took up her position at one end of the row of tables.

Catherine turned her eyes away from the harbour and met Martin's gaze. "England seems very far away," she said.

He leaned his arm upon the table as he asked "You have not been unhappy here?"

Catherine smiled. "Very happy, I think. I love Mentone. And Clare is kind and my writing is so very much to me. But England—my father is there."

Martin shook his head. "He is here, with you—Catherine."

She started a little at the sound of the unaccustomed name and her lips quivered.

Martin spoke very low. "You know that you have taught me to love him. My hope is that one day we may stand together beside his grave."

Catherine turned her head a little to where the woman sat before an empty table, a smile set on her lips, her eyes watchful under the wi-

hat brim. "The world accounts me as one of these," she said.

Martin made a gesture of pain. "The citizens of Corinth accounted the burning of their city an evil," he answered; "but when the flames died down they found in the smelting of metals that brass for which Corinth is famed throughout the ages."

Catherine smiled a little and shook her head.

Martin bent forward and his voice dropped almost to a whisper.

"Did you not know that we understood, Conway and I? Long ago. And Conway, I think, feared for you a little. But I—I was always sure of you."

Into Catherine's eyes crept the dawn of a wonder that widened slowly into day.

Martin knew that she understood. He laid his hand, palm upward, on the table between them, and after a while Catherine put her own into it with bowed head.

Martin held it close. "I think," he said, "that Conway's spirit talks with his, and Robert Arlsea smiles."

The woman seated at the empty table glanced upwards as they passed, idly appraising Catherine's dress. But when her tired eyes met the deep grey ones, they rested there and the lines about her hard mouth relaxed.

The waves lapped rhythmically on the unheeding shore. Far out beyond the harbour wall the light shone silver on the waters.

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